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The Coyle Collection.

Miss Jean L. Coyle
of Detroit

in memory of her brother
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By **ELIZABETH W. CHAMPNEY**

ROMANCE OF THE FEUDAL CHÂTEAUX.

**ROMANCE OF THE RENAISSANCE CHÂ-
TEAUX.**

ROMANCE OF THE BOURBON CHÂTEAUX.

ROMANCE OF THE FRENCH ABBEYS.

ROMANCE OF THE ITALIAN VILLAS.

1470



Portrait of Giovanna Tornabuoni Botticelli

From a pastel copy by J. Wells Champney of the original fresco
made for the Villa Lemmi, now in the Gallery of the Louvre

ROMANCE OF
THE ITALIAN VILLAS
(NORTHERN ITALY)

BY
ELIZABETH W. CHAMPNEY
AUTHOR OF "ROMANCE OF THE FEUDAL CHÂTEAUX," "ROMANCE OF THE
RENAISSANCE CHÂTEAUX," "ROMANCE OF FRENCH ABBEYS," ETC.



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ELIZABETH W. CHAMPNEY

The Knickerbocker Press, New York



PREFACE

ARE these stories true?" Yes, true as brain and heart can make them. I have not, like Froude "attempted in cold blood to impart verisimilitude to otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." Earnestly and without regard to the labour involved I have sought the essential truth.

Returning from rambles in northern Italy, where I have been a guest, as at Villa Giusti, in Edens whose Eves have been long forgotten by their own descendants I have sought until their faces were revealed in a darkening canvas on the wall of some old palace and their lives as by flash-light by poets such as Dante, Bonifazio, or Cino.

Sometimes the story has come first, the plot made familiar by an Elizabethan dramatist, but only half believed, until the place itself has illustrated and verified the almost in-

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credible scenario as when at Lante the glorious youths of the central fountain held high before my dazzled vision the star-crowned mountains of the Montaltos and I knew that this was the villa purchased by Sixtus V. for Vittoria Accoramboni.

Again when history has told the romance, vouching incontestably for the melodramatic episodes, and the crumbling walls of the degraded villa have been inspected only to make the tale seem more far-away and improbable, I have continued to seek diligently, like the merchantman matching his goodly pearls, until from one of Botticelli's fading frescoes a face like that of Giovanna Tornabuoni has shone forth—the one lacking pearl, completing and clasping the circlet, making the story possible and the place real.

Such truths are made known to us in still subtler ways: Who of her latter-day lovers that has stood by the tomb of Ilaria has not known intuitively what feeling drove the chisel of the sculptor precisely as Kenyon Cox recognised it in his exquisite lines to *The Unknown Woman*?

She lived in Florence centuries ago

That lady smiling there.

What was her name or rank? I do not know.

I know that she was fair.
For some great man, his name like her's forgot
And faded from men's sight,
Loved her, he must have loved her, and has wrought
This bust for our delight.

Browning wrote of his poem of *Sordello*:
"The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires, my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul, little else is worth study." But Browning's insight into the deepest secrets of *Sordello* came from long brooding over the man's poems, and his masterly creation of character in *The Ring and the Book* from like conscientious study of the documentary evidence until it all lay plain before him; not so it *might* have been, but so, and only so could it have taken place.

Dante crystallises for us a life's experience into a single line. Take such a crystal with you to La Pia's villa, to Ezzelino's tower of horror, and to Matilda's or Francesca's castle; do not think in so doing you are looking at them through library lenses, by the use of such field-glasses truths as well as beauties are discernable in the very physical landscape which our unassisted vision is powerless to detect. The marriage of place and story enhances our

delight in each, and such delight is unending; for whether in reading or exploration the field is illimitable. I have pointed the way in these pages to only a few of the villas of Tuscany, Lombardy, and Venetia which have exercised upon my imagination a compelling charm. This is neither an architectural nor an historical work. It is merely an honest attempt to relate certain incidents which have taken place in the most accessible and beautiful of the north Italian villas, and to introduce to you the gentle ladies who once made these homes still more enchanting.

From the great number which vie for our attention in the neighbourhood of Florence I have chosen the Medicean villas and those made famous by Dante and Boccaccio. Isola Bella alone must stand for the charmed region of the Italian Lakes, and of Palladio's palaces near Vicenza and other sub-Alpine towns I have found space only for the Villa Giacomelli with its little known decorations by Paul Veronese. Asolo, the villa which Caterina Cornaro received from Venice in exchange for her kingdom of Cyprus receives but a glance, and the Villa Pisani at Stra represents the engaging sisterhood which touch hands along the Brenta between Padua and Venice.

A few old castles, not strictly villas, have been included for the sake of their legends and their own picturesqueness such as Matilda's at Canossa, the Rocca of the Malatestas with its traditions of Francesca, Ezzelino's tower at Padua, and the castle of the San Bonifazios at Verona.

La Pia's prison-like palace at Siena is shown as more accessible than her lonely villa in the Maremma, and our itinerary reaches its southernmost point in Vignola's masterpieces of villa architecture, Lante and Caprarola.

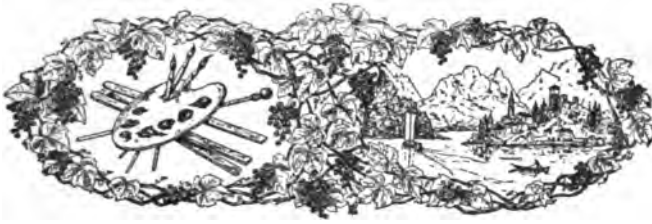
This is but a meagre foretaste of what lies before the traveller, and that her readers may fare further and better is the sincere wish of

THE AUTHOR.



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ROMANCE OF THE ITALIAN VILLAS

CHAPTER I

THE VILLA OF THE LEOPARD

“PURR, purr,” murmured the great tiger-cat, its yellow eyes mere glints in their sleepy slits, and its lithe figure relaxed by languor and satiety into a deceptive semblance of bonhomie.

Thrum, thrum! across the sultry air there throbbed the resonant twang of the bass strings of a theorbo, and instantly every nerve in the leopard’s body stiffened to sympathetic tenseness with the vibrant cord.

Thrum, thrum! the persistent plucking of the tortured nerves was more than the sensi-

tive animal could endure, the alert head was thrown back,—nostrils contracted, murderous teeth showing themselves under the quivering moustache, while the eyes, wide open now, glowed like lambent coals, and a low snarl answered the teasing note.

“He is magnificent!” cried Bianca, in a transport of admiration, “he would leap upon you, and kill you, Pietro, if the door of his cage were open.”

Even as she spoke, the infuriated creature threw himself against the bars of his cage, snatching through them at the nodding peacock’s feather in the cap of the musician and snapping it in his claws.

Bianca clapped her hands with delight, but the youth stepped back a trifle pale, and resumed his strumming at a safer distance.

“Uncomplimentary beast!” he muttered, “it is lucky for me that all of my auditors are not affected in the same way by my playing. Lash your sides in fury, you shall listen as long as I please, though you foam yourself mad, devil beast.”

The leopard bit the bars in his impotent rage, and Bianca laughed again.

“One would think that he imagined your strumming was the challenge to battle of



BIANCA CAPELLO
Bronzino, in Pitti Gallery

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some rival. It is a cat-call, Signor Leopardo. It is the signal by which my Pietro lets me know that he is waiting for me in the gondola at the garden gate. Are you jealous, leopard? Let me take the theorbo, Pietro, and see if I can calm him."

The girl caressed the strings, and a droning slumbrous murmur soothed the leopard into quiescence; the bristling fur was rubbed smooth as he fawned against the bars, and he purred again good-humouredly, but as Bianca extended her hand to pat his head her lover caught it back.

"Have a care!" he cried. "Child, when you know that I cannot keep my lips from you, do you imagine that a leopard has more self-control? Now that you have had your wish, Bianca, we must not come again. It is too dangerous a place. I do not mean solely on account of the leopard. The public gardens are too much frequented. We must go out no more by daylight or your stepmother will be told how you spend the hours of her siesta."

"The night is safer," Bianca assented, regardless of its graver dangers.

The prettiest girl in all Venice, and noble and rich withal, what reckless folly tempted

her to gallivant with this roguish, handsome clerk, who made eyes at her from the Florentine banking house opposite her father's palazzo?

It was the heart-hunger in which she had been reared that had made her snatch greedily at the first love offered; but, unfortunately for Bianca, her stepmother had also through her closed blinds noted the adoring face of the slim youth who neglected his accounts to stare toward Bianca's balcony. Jealous of her husband's affection for his motherless child, and like other members of the Grimani family, malicious as well as jealous, the Signora Cappello watched the inevitable progress of the intrigue. In the quivering heat of midday when all Venice was supposed to be drowsing, the banker's clerk, Pietro de Zenobio Bonaventuri, at liberty to take his nooning, invariably stepped into a gondola and taking a circuitous route paused in a side canal at a postern gate and presently the "wiry chords" of his theorbo woke responsive throbs in Bianca's heart as she slipped noiselessly down the staircase and into the shelter of the shadowy felsa.

The stepmother made no attempt to hinder these clandestine excursions; but the culprits were followed by a spy who reported their

destination. It was such absurdly innocent pleasuring, for like two children on a holiday they invariably sought the public garden, amusing themselves by strolling through the menagerie, and feeding or teasing the animals. For Bianca's passion for pets had never been permitted so much as a cat upon which to lavish itself. The great felines were her especial admiration, possibly because there was something akin to the panther in her own nature, and it may be that some occult premonition of the tragical part which it was to play in her own history attracted her to the leopard.

The Signora Capello bided her time patiently. What was now simply indiscretion was sure to ripen into at least the semblance of guilt, and when the young couple dared an evening excursion she judged that the opportunity had arrived for discrediting Bianca with her proud father, and the lovers returning to the garden gate found it bolted.

"We are discovered," gasped Bianca. "Go away, my father would kill you, if he found you with me."

"And you?" Pietro questioned.

Bianca paled, but answered bravely, "I shall ring, one of the servants will come, my father may not know."

But her lover pointed to a dimly lighted window where a sinister silhouette was outlined darkly. The Signor Barthelmi Capello was waiting grimly for his daughter's return. With that vision a panic seized the shrinking child.

"I dare not face him," she whispered, "take me with you and hide me."

"But where in Venice?" the young man asked himself, for Capello was all powerful in the Council of Ten.

"Come with me to my native city of Florence," he besought with the reckless impetuosity of youthful passion, "for there we shall be safe."

The girl took clearer note of the consequences of such a step.

"If you do this you sacrifice all your prospects in life," she said gravely.

"No matter. I love you."

Instantly the shrinking child was transformed to a resolute woman. Dismay at what she too must sacrifice, fear of the unknown future, doubt of her lover and of her own heart, every hesitation, every restraint, were swept away by the intruding tide of triumphant love.

"It is 'all for love and the world well lost'

for us both, my Pietro, we must never fail each other."

But in Florence, in the sordid home of the Bonaventuri, the son who had lost his lucrative position and returned with a dowerless bride found cold welcome, and as the poverty of the family increased Bianca's life became one of unaccustomed drudgery. She bore it bravely, sustained by her husband's affection. Together they wrung out the household linen which she washed in the public fountain, Pietro carrying the bundle homeward, since her delicate neck had not the strength to bear it in the proud caryatid fashion of the Tuscan contadinas.

She endured the vulgar tyranny and recriminations of Pietro's mother until she saw that the reproaches of Mona Bonaventuri that she had ruined her son's future were poisoning Pietro's mind, that he was growing gloomy, and at times looked at her strangely. Then the fear that she had given everything for nothing grew upon her and she wept at night till her husband wakened by her sobbing comforted her with his protestations.

But a new consternation fell upon them both with the rumour that the Doge of Venice

had demanded the extradition of the eloping couple.

Only one expedient suggested itself, to seek the protection of Francesco de' Medici.

The Grand Duke was persuaded through an influential friend to give them an audience and listened benignly, his interest deepening as he scanned Bianca's pathetic face.

"No, by the lilies of Florence," he cried, "come what may, no Florentine or wife of a Florentine shall be given over to the power of our rival republic of Venice. But since treachery may be employed where blustering cannot effect its purpose, it were well that this second Helen should find her Troy in our fortified Villa of Castello and her gallant husband shall have a post at court."

Bianca, overjoyed, kissed the hand of the Grand Duke, and her delight deepened as she saw with what satisfaction this change in their fortunes was welcomed by the Bonaventuri family. Pietro's mother fawned upon her in an excess of gratitude.

"It is all owing to your beauty," she said frankly, and this is but the beginning. The man's infatuation will grow. Play your cards well and there is nothing you can not coax from him for yourself and Pietro."



VILLA REALE DE CASTELLO
Near Florence

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"We want nothing at the price of dishonour," Pietro flashed back, and Bianca's radiant face clouded.

"Pish! who talks of dishonour? Can you not trust your wife? A little tact on the part of you both is all that is necessary. Be deaf to malicious gossip, leave everything in Bianca's hands. She will wheedle the Grand Duke and fool him, too, and your fortune is made."

So, Pietro, sulky at first, but as indulgence in luxury weakened his reluctance, wilfully blind to his wife's peril, entered upon a round of dissipation, and Francesco de' Medici became madly enamoured of Bianca. Her woman's intuition made her aware of this, but she believed herself clever enough to tread the dangerous path which her mother-in-law had marked out, and true to her husband and crafty beyond her years, held the Grand Duke at arm's-length, driving him wild by her alternate daring and decorum. He soon perceived that this coveted prize was not to drop into his hand like ripe fruit, and Mona Bonaventuri's prediction was fulfilled. Bianca could express no desire which was not immediately gratified. Was it a town house, the palace in the Via Maggio was placed at her

disposal. Were its gardens too limited the Orti Oricellari of the Rucellais, where Lorenzo the Magnificent entertained the Platonic Academy, became the stage setting for extravagant banquets.

The nobility of Florence grovelled for her favour, though tongues were thrust into cheeks and shoulders shrugged when her back was turned.

But though Pietro preferred the Florentine palace with its round of social distraction, Bianca's favourite residence was the Villa of Castello, with its terraced gardens, its fountain by Tribolo, its ilex grove, and frescoed loggias.

The crowning delight of Castello to Bianca was the terminating feature of the long suite of terraces, two fantastic grottos crowded with sculptured animals coloured to the life, boars and deer, with real tusks and antlers, horses leaping in the splashing water and dogs apparently lapping from the pools, sly foxes and bears half hidden in their rock-work caves, and even stranger creatures, hippopotami, and a tall giraffe, the effigy so the Duke told her, of a famous one which the Sultan of Turkey had sent to Lorenzo the Magnificent.

Bianca had clapped her hands in childish



FOUNTAIN, ATTRIBUTED TO DONATELLO, AND GROTTA AT CASTELLO

1900

delight when these fountains were first shown her by the Duke, but suddenly her expression had changed to one of wistfulness.

"I do not see any leopard," she cavilled. "Ah! if only I had the beautiful leopard which I used to play with at Venice, then Castello would be a perfect Eden."

"I am glad he is at a safe distance," Pietro had replied. "A dangerous brute, your Highness, and no friend to me. I cannot understand why my wife fancied him."

"For the same reason that I am fond of you, my love," Bianca replied jestingly. "It gives me a sense of power to know that I can charm even a brute."

It was not long before Bianca knew the truth which underlay her flippant repartee. Pietro spent all of his time now in dissipation in Florence and the loneliness of Castello became so insupportable that Bianca made friends with Pietro's mother whom her husband had installed as her companion. It was the Duke himself who had suggested this.

"It will be a gag to malicious tongues," he had said in the presence of Pietro, "so young and so beautiful a woman should not be left unguarded in your absence and what better chaperone than your mother?"

Pietro scowled. He knew his mother and he felt in those smooth words that the Duke knew her too, and one afternoon that happened which Pietro had vaguely foreseen would happen; and Bianca no longer able to cajole the beast in the Duke came flying to Mona Bonaventuri with indignation and terror in her eyes:

"I have sent him away," she sobbed, "and must never see him again. We must leave this villa, and return to your home at Florence. No, I am not mistaken. Shame is the price demanded for all these favours."

Mona Bonaventuri in her attempts to curb this undesired virtue appealed to Bianca's love for her husband, arguing that Pietro's honours and wealth would surely melt away in the vindictiveness of his angry patron. All in vain Bianca replied monotonously:

"Pietro would a thousand times rather labour honestly with us for his bread than that I should bring disgrace upon him."

At her wits' end, her patience quite worn out, the crone hissed:

"Pietro expected nothing short of this when he accepted the Duke's bounty, far from reproaching you with infidelity he would consider you lacking in your duty to him if you

refused him this slight service. He is not so true to you that you should have any hesitation in refusing love when it comes."

Then the outraged girl turned from the vile woman in heartsick scorn, and faced her would-be lover with white face and blazing eyes:

"It is true," she said, "what you told me is true. Pietro sold his interest in me to you, his mother has confessed it. So be it, your Highness, from henceforth I have no further interest in him. Nay, that is not true, either, I hate him, hate him. Kill him for me, your Highness, kill him, and marry me—and I will love you all my life."

"What a little tiger-cat it is," said the Duke wonderingly, as he lifted the girl from the ground, for she was embracing his knees.

"Listen, Bianca, I would gladly make you my duchess if I could, but you are already wedded."

"Kill him, kill him," she demanded insistently.

"Nay, that I cannot, I am not an assassin, Little One."

"There are bravi who can be hired for money, your Highness."

Mona Bonaventuri uttered a low cry of

dismay: "She will do it herself, if we do not prevent her."

"Yes, I will do it," Bianca replied. "If you will marry me I will make myself a widow within a week."

Mona Bonaventuri shrieked aloud:

"Merciful Mary! You would be hung, the Duke could not marry a murderess," she said.

"Then I will kill myself," Bianca continued as steadily. "I promised to love my husband until death. I love him no longer, so one of us must die. As for that shameful thing which his mother and he planned, it can never be. I was his honourable wife and I will be yours if you will pay the price."

She left them with the dignity of a queen, and the two conspirators glared at one another, baffled, and ashamed.

"By my Saviour!" muttered the Duke, "I am more madly in love with her than ever, now that I know her to be virtuous. She would make a duchess worthy of my coronet."

"Will you pay the price she demands?" asked Mona Bonaventuri.

"No, but she will, and if you let her kill herself I will have you and your son drawn and quartered."

"Mercy, Magnificence, wait but the week

which she has set. She will have time to reconsider, and all shall be as you wish."

The wretched woman knew that this could never be. But though a week was short time, much might be done within its limits—and leaving Bianca at Castello, where she was practically a prisoner under the Duke's guard, she hastened to Florence and took counsel with her craven son.

Two days later the news spread like wildfire through Florence that Pietro Bonaventuri, returning from a visit to his mistress, had been assassinated on the bridge of the Santa Trinita by unknown bravi. His servants had fled, giving the alarm to the police who arrived upon the scene only to find the murderers gone and Pietro's handsome face stabbed out of all recognition. They bore him to his home, and Bianca having been informed of her widowhood dutifully attended the funeral rites. The Grand Duke attempted to spread the impression that Pietro had been murdered by the relatives of his mistress, but no official inquiry was made or attempt to bring the guilty to justice, and Florentine opinion was divided only as to whether Bianca or Francesco de' Medici had compassed the death of the young man.

The very parties suspected were themselves

of these opposite opinions, for in reality each was innocent of more than desiring Pietro's death, and each believed the other guilty. Mona Bonaventuri was overwhelmed with favours from both, the Duke continuing her son's salary as a pension. She accepted it as a bribe and carried herself with malevolent arrogance, an inscrutable expression of mysterious knowledge upon her face.

Bianca clad herself in widows' weeds but foresaw that her period of mourning would be brief. She told herself that the hour of her triumph had come, and her love for Pietro had been so completely swallowed up in hatred that she felt no scruples in rewarding the man who, she believed, had for her sake executed this terrible vengeance.

Strange, indeed, was the tangle in which fate had involved the couple. Had the Duke not loved Bianca he might well, believing her a murderess, have hesitated to make her his wife. But the conviction that her love for him had impelled her to commit this crime at once flattered his egotism and convinced him that he was in a measure responsible for the act. A not ignoble pity filled his heart. Was it not his duty to save her from utter desperation?

It also happened, most opportunely for Bianca, that at this moment delicate negotiations were in progress between Florence and Venice, and Francesco felt the necessity of using the utmost diplomacy to effect a defensive alliance with that republic against the menacing Guelfs.

One of the points which the Venetian Ambassador now brought up was the return of Bianca, and this insistence awakened all the chivalry as well as the obstinacy of the Duke's character.

He replied by making a formal offer of marriage, asking the Venetian Senate to grant him the hand of Bianca as symbol and seal of the alliance between the two republics.

The honour of the offer was fully appreciated in Venice, even the offended father, the Signor Capello, felt his grievance melt away when it was explained that Bianca was to become Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

A representative of the Doge brought gifts of jewels and plate and a letter in which Bianca was besought to name any gift from her native city which would give her special pleasure.

Bianca replied promptly, "The leopard in the public garden."

It was a strange pet for a gentle lady, but not so strange at that period as it would seem now, for leopards were trained in Oriental countries for hunting and in Benozzo Gozzoli's decoration of the chapel in the Florentine palace of the Medici's servants led leopards in leash in the train of Lorenzo the Magnificent.

So the bride's whim was humoured and the leopard sent from Venice to be led by a black-amoor in that triumphant wedding-procession.

Later a cage was arranged for the animal at Castello near the fountains with their mimic wild creatures, and here its mistress frequently came to watch her pet fed by his swarthy keeper. He was too old to be taught tricks or trained to hunt, too dangerous to be allowed the freedom of the garden, and Bianca was cautioned against any attempt to caress him through the bars of the cage, but she brought her lute and at a safe distance experimented as in the old Venetian days in the power of music to lull and to rouse the creature's passions.

So the days glided by in that charmed garden. Bianca was at the summit of her ambition. There were no shrugs or inuendoes now, when she appeared in public. Even Car-



THE SENATORS, VILLA OF CASTELLO
From a photograph by Mr. Charles A. Platt

May 10

dinal Ferdinando, the Duke's younger brother and heir, masked his hatred and bent a hypocritical knee, biding his time. For to him as well as to Bianca there were signs that the newly wedded pair had built their pleasure palace upon the thin crust of a smouldering volcano. Already the Duke fell into moody fits in which he stared malignantly upon his bride.

"It is the beginning of remorse," she said to herself. "He repents the crime with which he purchased me," and in truth for what she believed to be his suffering of soul as much as in desperate maintenance of the position she had gained, she plied every art of fascination.

He meantime regarded her at times with horror. "Tigress," he thought, "how terrible is the love which the least jealousy might turn to murder."

So they misunderstood each other, putting continual misconstruction on every act and word, until one day, as Bianca sat in the gazebo at the angle of the wall, at the back of the grounds staring idly down the long unfrequented road which stretched toward Florence, she suddenly flung her arms above her head in terror and sank to the floor a

grovelling heap of misery, for she had recognised, as far as the eye could discern it a familiar figure stepping jauntily along, a cloak with which he might have disguised himself on the more frequented highway, trailing from one arm.

"My God," she whispered, "my God! Pietro is alive! Then what am I?"

She was not mistaken, for Pietro had not been assassinated, but had secretly left Florence. His crafty mother had gained possession of some other corpse, had caused it to be robed in Pietro's clothing, and to be so disfigured as not to give the lie to the story of the night attack as told by the servants who had left it on the bridge. Bianca saw the truth as by a flash of lightning. It was a clever trick and no one would have discovered the truth if Pietro had only remained away. What had brought him back, and in the face of certain death?

Then came another thought. If the Duke knew that Pietro lived, would he not in his anger at the deception, which he would inevitably believe had been planned by her, welcome with avidity this opportunity to cast her off?

Pietro must flee at once. Nay, even im-



FARMHOUSE AT CASTELLO
From a photograph by Mr. Charles A. Platt



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mediate flight was not to be trusted. He must die and quickly.

He was beneath the gazebo strumming upon his theorbo the old call which she had answered so often when it yearned to her window from the gondola at the garden gate. Had he seen her?—she wondered, and lay motionless, hardly daring to breathe. Then, suddenly, there was a scrambling noise. He was actually climbing the wall by the help of the vine, and presently his velvet cap pushed aside the tassels of the wistaria and his bright eyes peered between them.

“Bianca,” he cried—and she sat up, her eyes wide with terror.

“Oh, why have you come? Why have you come?” she repeated.

“Because I love you, because I cannot live without you. I have come to take you away with me. Nay, there is no danger. I am in the employ of a French nobleman whose galley drops down the Arno to-night. No one has recognised me. Disguise yourself as a youth and come back to me. It will be dusk, the very moment to evade scrutiny. I will not let you free, Bianca, till you tell me that you have longed for me as I for you, till you promise to fly a second time with me.”

"I promise," she gasped, wrenching herself from him. "Conceal yourself in the shrubbery. I will get my jewels and return! Hide quickly, for I hear footsteps."

Distraught with terror Bianca fled from the spot. Pietro must die, but whom could she trust as an accomplice? Not the Duke's guards. Must she do the deed herself? Among her wedding gifts was a stiletto. She tried to imagine how easily it could be done in their first close embrace. But how dispose of the tell-tale body? She shuddered and caught at the nearest support, and was startled by an angry snarl, for in her preoccupation she had wandered to the leopard's cage, and he was confronting her with glaring eyes. The hair upon his spine was bristling. What had roused him to such unusual excitement?

Suddenly the distant twang of Pietro's theorbo thrummed in the silence. The imprudent minstrel was calling his lady, for in her mental disorder she had paced the garden longer than she realised. The leopard answered each chord with growls which grew more and more menacing.

Quick as thought Bianca slipped the bolt of the door and leaving it ajar fled swiftly toward the villa, pausing in the circle of light

cast by a torch in an iron wall socket. From this point of vantage the cage was visible, and presently its grille swung forward and a shadowy form stole softly toward the gazebo. Bianca retraced her steps cautiously for a short distance listening intently.

Suddenly a scream rent the stillness, and Hamet, keeper of the leopard, came running toward her—crying:

“Duchessa, go back, I beseech you, into the palace, the leopard is at large!”

“Nay, I must know what has happened,” she replied, and snatching the torch from its support she followed Hamet who had dashed in the direction of the cry. She strove to hasten but her limbs were lead and presently the black returning blocked her way.

“Go back, Madonna, I entreat of you. I have killed the leopard, but I was too late. There is a sight there which is not fit for your gentle eyes.”

“Is he dead—the man?” she stammered.

“The leopard is gorged with his blood, its teeth are still in his throat.”

She trembled so that sparks from the torch rained around her—there was a hubbub of voices in the garden, the guards of the villa had discovered the tragedy, and were ex-

citedly shouting their horror and their surmises.

Bianca summoned all her bravado.

"Has the man been recognised?" she asked. "Is it known for whose death we are answerable?"

"No, your Highness, the leopard's claws are where his eyes once were, and his face is so torn that his own wife would not know him."

"Hamet is wrong." It was the Grand Duke himself who spoke, with an awful gladness in his voice. "You would know him, Bianca, even now, for I did. He has met his just deserts, for he had no right to come back from the grave, and yet I am glad for the manner of his death, for God forgive me, until now I have thought you responsible for it."

She lifted a white face to his.

"I was not a murderess," she replied with quivering lips, but while he strained her close, believing her innocent, she heard in the depths of her soul the self accusing words which must ring in her ears until her death: "I was not a murderess, but I am one now."



CHAPTER II

THE LAIR OF THE WHITE DEVIL

[A relation purporting to have been dictated by Marcello Accoramboni what time he lay in prison at Ancona A.D. 1586.]

YOU ask me, holy Father, to tell you plainly whether my sister was confederate with me in the murder of her husband, and I answer that I can not, for I do not know.

Nay, never look at me so incredulously,—I lie here under sentence of death, and I can gain no mercy for myself by incriminating her. Therefore even if she were guilty why should I vilify her memory, since she has passed beyond the power of earthly justice. But mark you on the other hand, having confessed my sins, I have no mind to add others to my account by calling black white, I am not obdurate and I will now relate unre-

servedly and dispassionately (for I have nothing to gain or to lose more in this world), all that I know of this miserable business.

It is his Holiness you say who demands from me this ante-mortem statement, in that he would be certified whether Vittoria died a martyr or suffered the just penalty of her crimes.

I can understand why Sixtus would wish to be assured on this point. Let him judge for himself when I have finished my Relation. Was it her fault, I ask him, that God endowed her with such fateful, all-compelling charm that none could look upon her unmoved; but every man who knew her, whether good or bad, according to his nature either loved or hated her with such intensity that he gave up his own life for her or took the lives of others and went to hell for her sake? So Francesco Peretti loved and died for her, and so her innocent brother Flaminio. So the great Duke of Bracciano, Paolo Giordano Orsini, loved her that he killed his wife, and defied excommunication that he might make her his duchess. So I, more guilty, loved her and am a murderer. So the Cardinal di Montalto was bewitched by her, that he, believing her a pearl among women, sought her

in marriage for his idolised nephew, and schemed and plotted for her sake; and now this man who knew her as intimately as I, and who, having become Pope, is infallible, asks me if she were angel or devil—and I answer upon my soul that I do not know.

Angel she seemed to her six brothers, who were her willing serfs in her winsome childhood, but most of all to me, and to Flaminio the youngest, the baby of our flock, for she came between us in order of our birth, and we being close of an age were playmates and companions. Ours was a noble but impoverished family, which, preserving traditions of grandeur, longed inordinately for its outward expression.

Early in life I was given the post of chamberlain in the household of the Duke of Bracciano, and being familiar with the life which was led in the magnificent Orsini palace at Rome, in the great castle of Bracciano and in the villa of Poggio Imperiale at Florence, which his wife brought him, I came at last to dream of like magnificence for my sister.

I had often spoken to the Duke of Vittoria's beauty, and at last I succeeded in exciting his curiosity and brought about a meeting. It was at the festival given in the spring of the

year 1572 by Cardinal di Gambara on the completion of his villa near Viterbo, and I shall speak of this villa with particularity because it was the Pandora's box from which sprang all our troubles.

The Duke, who had received several cards of invitation to the fête, presented me with two, bidding me treat my sister to the day's festivities, and I had agreed to be with her at a certain hour in a little casino which crowns the terraces at the back of the gardens. My sister was intoxicated by the beauty of the villa, by the gay company, by the music, the sports, and by all the delights displayed and suggested by this her first glimpse at the life of the great. She held her head high and gripped my hand hard as we wandered from one radiant scene to another. "I never dreamed of anything so beautiful," she said beneath her breath, and indeed, Vignola, the great villa architect, had here achieved his masterpiece. The garden lies on a plateau which dips in three directions to valleys walled on their further rim by blue mountains, but on its fourth side it climbs a wooded hill down which brawled a little stream, and it was this ascent which we mounted together at the hour appointed.

"How the brook leaps and frolics in the cascades and dances in the spray of the fountains, and sings in this long marble runnel which the architect has provided for it," said Vittoria. "One would think that the little water sprite which inhabits it would be impatient of these devices, but she seems to sport in them as though they were provided for her sole entertainment. Listen, I can almost make out the words of her song:

"Follow, follow!
Leave the wildwood
Of your childhood.
Dark your mountains,
Bright my fountains;
And this marble conduit hollow
With its chalice
Is my palace.
Reck not duty,
Love and beauty
Bid you follow.
Share my palace,
Sip the chalice,
Leave the wildwood
Of your childhood,
Follow, follow, follow, follow."

"So," I said, "this pleases you. Good, for I intend that a villa as beautiful shall one day be yours. There is a man waiting to meet you at this moment in the little casino

at the head of the terrace staircase who could give you such a garden if he cared to do so."

"You mean your patron, the Duke of Bracciano?" she asked and her face clouded.

"Yes," I replied, "but you will never win your villa if you show him that sulky face. What ails you Vittoria? You have said an hundred times that you longed for a life like this, and now that I offer it you do not seem either pleased or grateful."

"Indeed I am grateful, Marcello, but you should have taken me into your confidence, for when I knew that I was to be here to-day I told Francesco Peretti. He is coming with his uncle, the Cardinal di Montalto. It would be awkward if Francesco were to interrupt my tête-à-tête with the Duke."

"O Vittoria," I grumbled, "how often have I reprimanded you for your coquetry. Francesco is a pretty fellow, but he has no prospects, for the Cardinal is an ascetic. He despises wealth and luxury and will never place his nephew in the way of those temptations. Think no more of him, but trip up that staircase. The stream calls you, as you have guessed, to love and fortune. I will



CASINO AT VILLA LANTE
From a photograph by Mr. Charles A. Platt



CASINO AT CAPRAROLA
By Vignola. Southern façade on crest of hill

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stretch myself here on this marble bench and intercept Francesco, should he chance to stroll this way."

I had lain there but a few minutes before I saw the youth approaching in company with his uncle, and both so absorbed in talk that they did not mark my presence until I stopped their way. I did not like the Cardinal's looks, a grim, sour man at all times, and something which the nephew had just said had angered him, for he struck a rose from its stalk with his staff, and I fastened it jauntily on my breast as I confronted him.

"Ah! it is you, Signor Marcello," said Francesco. "Where is your charming sister? We were just speaking of her. So you do not know my uncle; allow me to present you." I bowed effusively and endeavoured to convince Francesco that Vittoria was in the parterre in the lower garden, but it seemed that he had just searched it for her, and Cardinal di Montalto was determined to pursue his way to the casino. I persuaded him to take a circuitous path as less fatiguing, and, mounting the staircase at a run, I was able to give the alarm to the Duke of Bracciano before their arrival.

I was not a moment too soon, for the Duke

was scarcely half-way down the steps before the Cardinal and Francesco presented themselves. Di Montalto regarded me with surprise and disapproval, but I explained glibly that my sister had joined me after they parted from me, and that I had brought her to the little pleasure-house to meet them. He sniffed incredulously and studied her keenly from under his bushy brows. But Vittoria, who had risen to meet them with pleased alacrity, was not a whit discomposed. She greeted his Eminence with charming deference, and darted Francesco a smile of such sweetness that I was furious. To my further disgust the two Montaltos seated themselves and allowed themselves to be entertained by her for an hour or more, the Cardinal becoming each moment more and more bewitched by her pretty airs and graces.

At last, when I could endure it no longer, I insisted that the guests were leaving and that it was time that we also took our departure; but the Cardinal waved me imperiously to my seat, with the following astounding proposal:

"Nay, not so fast, my friends, for we shall have no better opportunity than this to come to an understanding. My nephew has been speaking to me of you,

Signorina. I confess that I had entertained other views for him, but you have won me, as you doubtless did Francesco, at first sight. Signor Marcello, as we are the nearest relatives of this young couple, I have the honour to propose to you in my nephew's name for the hand of your sister."

I could only stammer in reply:

"Your Eminence, such a proposition from a man in your elevated position is most flattering. May I ask what prospects you can assure your noble nephew, to warrant his assuming the responsibilities of married life?"

"My nephew's fortune at least equals your sister's probable dowry," the Cardinal retorted.

"I doubt it," I replied. "My sister's dowry is her beauty, which will command a good jointure, possibly a greater one than your Eminence may have imagined. Pardon me if I intimate that I also have had my schemes."

"But none which suit me so well as yours, reverend sir," Vittoria interrupted, kissing the Cardinal's hand; "Francesco and I love each other very dearly, and we trust our future to you."

"I can only promise," di Montalto replied,

"that I will make it my care. If you have sufficient courage and patience to endure some present privation, in good time you shall have a home as beautiful as this villa; it is not even impossible that I may secure this estate for you."

I gaped upon him with astonishment, while he continued:

"Gambara here is a fool. He is antagonising the Pope by his insane rivalry and is recklessly squandering his fortune for us. His Holiness can at any time force our host to resign his country-seat to the Patrimony of St. Peter, but it is too far from Rome for Gregory to be able to use it. The villa will be lent to the see of Viterbo. It is not too much to hope that I could be appointed to this bishopric. Have you not observed that Vignola has designed the garden to accommodate twin residences though Gambara has erected but one? I will complete the original plan. Gambara's present pavilion shall remain the bishop's palace, but the eastern one will be yours, for you will not refuse the old man a stroll in our common garden."

"It will be Paradise," murmured Vittoria, and Francesco stole an arm about her waist.

"And when, your Eminence," I asked



FOUNTAIN AND WATER PARTERRE AT VILLA LANTE

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almost sneeringly, "will the villa change proprietors?"

"Have patience, my son," he replied with utterly unruffled temper. "Have patience; it is not without significance that we have so aspiring a name. The Montaltos shall overtop other men just as the mountain from which our family derives its origin soars above the ranges at its feet. You will yet see the emblem of our house, the star-crowned mounts, displayed in the most honourable and conspicuous portion of this very garden." With that he took a ring from his hand, a gem carved in intaglio with the three mountains and the star, and gave it to his nephew, who placed it very gravely on Vittoria's finger, saying that he would wait upon our mother for her ratification of this compact. After they had taken their leave I rated my sister roundly. "You are by all odds," said I, "even for a woman, the most fickle-minded, unreliable, and inconsiderate creature with whom I have ever had experience."

Vittoria pursed her lips. "My dear brother," she replied, "none of those adjectives applies to me in the slightest degree."

"Do you deny," I demanded, "that you begged me to secure you an invitation to this

festival in order that you might see the Duke of Bracciano?"

"Yes and no, Marcello, for it was in order that the Duke might see me."

"And is not that the same thing?"

"Not at all. I have seen his Excellency a dozen times, as he passed on horseback. No so engaging a sight either, mountain of flesh that he is; but he has never once remarked me until this afternoon. How should he at the window of our poor house, in my shabby clothes? But to-day he has seen me becomingly dressed. These are only Roman pearls upon my neck, but do the Orsini jewels make a finer show on the throat of the Duchess? Do I look like a contadina who has strolled into this garden by chance and who finds herself out of place and abashed by its magnificence?"

"No, Vittoria, you are in your proper setting. You looked the princess when I interrupted your interview with the Duke, and what particularly enrages me is that he was certainly impressed. Ten minutes more and things might not now be as they are."

"He was more than impressed, my Marcello. He bent to inhale the perfume of the jasmine in my hair, and I felt the quick panting of his breath upon my cheek. He was

fascinated, drunk with my beauty, and he sat beside me speechless, staring, always staring, while I chatted to cover his embarrassment. And, though we were alone, he dared not so much as kiss my hand, but muttered 'God! How beautiful, you are!' like the fool he is."

"And what did you reply to that?" I asked.

"Not so beautiful as the Duchess, your Highness."

"Idiot!" I exclaimed, "to recall his wife to him at such a moment."

"Not so, Marcello, for he laughed bitterly—'Beautiful! So too many find her; but you are beautiful and good—an angel of innocence.'"

"And then?" I demanded excitedly.

"And then," my sister continued. "My lord," I said, "my innocence, in which you do me the honour to believe, is all I have!" He fell back as though he had been shot, and then you joined us, and not a moment too soon, for the Cardinal and Francesco were upon us. Indeed I had heard their footsteps on the gravel-path and knew some one was listening. You will admit that my reply was well thought out for that audience."

"Then it was because you knew yourself spied upon that you played the prude and answered as you did? You gave the Duke some sign? But in that case you would not have deliberately thrown away your chances and have affianced yourself not a half hour later to that pauper. I confess, Vittoria, I can not understand you."

"O Marcello *mio!*" exclaimed my sister, "have you still no wit to guess the truth? Must I explain it to you brutally? A sensation such as the Duke has experienced must be repeated again and again to become fixed. Where could I respond to an encore of that little tableau? Where could he in the cold distrust of his own impressions see me again to as great advantage? I could only fling myself at his head in some carnival frolic, and the most that I could hope for would be to be picked from the mud of the street to be transferred to a viler mire. A noble title indeed—mistress of the Duke of Bracciano! with even that equivocal position dependent on his whims and liable to be lost in his first fit of ill-humour.

"But, Vittoria," I persisted, "I tell you that the Duke and Duchess lead a cat-and-dog life. She is notoriously unfaithful, and

if you play your cards well you may be his wife."

She shook her head scornfully.

"Not if I were first his mistress. What need then to marry me? Nor in any case, Marcello, for we Accorambonis can hardly call ourselves noble, and are so poor that you are glad to be the Duke's menial. His wife is a de' Medici, the sister of the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Duke of Bracciano is an Orsini. They do not marry beggar-maids. But have no fear, I shall not throw away any influence which I may possess over him, or over any other man, not even over you, my dear Marcello. I shall make you all work for me, for it will be to your interest to do so.

"Do you not see that as the Signora Montalto, the wife of a cardinal's nephew, I shall have a respectable position, the *entrée* of society, opportunities of meeting the Duke, if not upon equality, at least in such a guise that it will not put him to the blush to recognise me? Ah! I shall make him pay dearly for the privilege of my acquaintance. I shall demand everything and give nothing, not the least little bit. Even the Cardinal will approve my behaviour, for he will see that I am fooling

the Duke to advance my husband's interests."

"You will do no such thing," I declared, "for then where will I be?"

"When I am through with the Duke of Bracciano we will all be in positions to snap our fingers at him. You are only his steward now, but he shall make your fortune. Francesco, too, will be satisfied with me, for he will understand me perfectly through it all, and the Duke will give him some high position at court."

I ran my fingers through my hair to cool my brain. "*Jésu !*" I said, "but you have an imagination! Still, to mount this little drama you must have costumes and scenery as well as clever actors. How can the Signora Montalto disport herself in patrician society without money? The Cardinal is as poor as a rat."

"The Cardinal is not poor, he is only niggardly, and that for the end which he explained. His asceticism is only a pose. He will relinquish it when he has gained the object of his ambition, the bishopric of Viterbo. He adores Francesco. Francesco adores me. We will make him hasten the execution of his schemes. The scenery which has proved to-day so successful in the first act of our drama

need not be shifted during a few more scenes, for the Duke shall see me as often as he likes in the same surroundings, and not as a guest but as the hostess of the Villa Montalto. It is not so far from the castle of Bracciano but that the Duke will ride to meet me, as he did to-day, and you, too, my Marcello. So here 's to your next coming to the villa."

Little did I foresee that when I should next look through its gates it would be to find the Cardinal's dream more than realised, but Francesco and my sister and the Duke all dead, and I a hunted murderer. I was won by her enthusiasm, carried away by the plausibility of her reasoning, and I gave my consent to her marriage with Francesco, fancying that if she could bide her time with patience then surely so could I.

Meekly she went with her bridegroom to Rome to live in that bare and gloomy palace with his uncle, the severe Cardinal. Virtuously and dutifully she served them, pining away, without society, without amusement, without admiration, which was to her what sunshine is to a flower. Even my mother who visited them for a space could not endure their life. "It is worse than that of the barefooted friars," she said; "every day is a fast

day and the icy *scagliola* has not a scrap of carpet even before Vittoria's bed.

"The poor girl never goes out except to church. Where is the merry life she dreamed, where the noble villa the Cardinal promised?"

"Where indeed?" I scoffed. "When I see the insignia of the Montaltos displayed on di Gambara's villa may I be beheaded and quartered for a villain."

"I tell you," my mother persisted, "she is dying of solitary imprisonment, for the Cardinal has forgotten his promise, or never made it in good faith."

He had not forgotten it, but it was a root in dry ground, which was overlong in coming to leaf and fruitage, and in the meantime the Duke of Bracciano's passion for my sister preyed upon him like hidden fire. One day, shortly before my sister's marriage, he was summoned to Florence upon the devil's own errand. His wife, Isabella de' Medici, sister as I have said of Francesco, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and of the Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici, was at this time leading such an evil life at Florence that her brothers, scandalised by the family disgrace, had sent for her husband, and now laying before him proofs of their accusations commanded him to do justice

upon her, as was his right. The Duke of Bracciano had long known of her infidelity, but was content to let her go her own way living in separation from him. Even now when her own brothers, the Grand Duke, representing civil judicial authority, and the Cardinal the authority of the Church, bade him act as her executioner, he might have hesitated had there not flashed into his mind the thought that this would leave him free to offer marriage to my sister. Thus it was her fault, or fate, that the Duke strangled his wife with a silken cord at their villa at Poggio Imperiale.

Had he confided in me before setting out to Florence I might have hindered my sister's marriage, but when he returned to Rome a free man she was the wife of Francesco.

In spite of this new barrier between them the Duke's infatuation did not die out, and, seeing him so enamoured and her so unhappy, ideas came into my head. The Duke now established himself at the Orsini palace in Rome and became very devout. The church which he frequented was the same where Vittoria knelt, her wan face ghostly in the wavering lights and shadows of the tapers.

She marked him from the first and knew what devotion brought him there. One day

they out-stayed the other worshippers, and kneeling at her side, while I stood by a pillar on the watch, he made his confession; how he had slain his duchess for her sake. Her eyes kindled and she looked at him not with horror but with admiration.

"*Jésu !*" she cried, "how you must love me, to have given your soul for my sake."

He paled a little. "And shall I not have my reward?" he asked "Alas!" she moaned. "Why did I not know this in time, for I am very wretched?"

"You love me then," he asked, "in spite of all you love me?"

And she,—as though some power beyond herself tore the avowal from her—"I love you, but it is too late."

With that she rose and left the church, nor did she enter it again, or otherwise give the Duke sight of her, or send him any message until he fell desperately ill.

It was not mere love-sickness, for the most learned leeches whom he consulted were of one opinion, namely, that his life was menaced by a cancer, and in all probability he had but a few years to live.

This threw the Duke at first into despair.

"Now that this *lupa* has fastened itself

upon me, like a wild beast at my throat," he said, "it is time that I turned my thoughts to the purging of my soul, for though I had hope of her love, what am I now that I should burden her with this body of living death?"

But even at this pass I gave not all up for lost, and I overwhelmed Vittoria with reproaches, showing her how, if some kindly Providence would but remove the undesired Francesco to the habitations of the blessed, she might yet be a duchess, and later the wealthiest widow in Italy. She answered me indignantly enough that, if she were indeed released from her present bonds, most joyously would she minister to the Duke, however loathsome his disease, sustaining his courage in his battle for life, not caring if in his pain he were morose or violent if so be through her solace he might win recovery in the end. "But no," she cried, "God will not take Francesco. He lets that worthless fool cumber the earth while such a man as the Duke dies in agony. He must not die, Marcello. Tell him to live for my sake."

I told him this and much more of my own invention, for I saw that the time was ripe, and that if I struck not now, even if the Duke

lived, I might never again be able to work both him and her to such a pitch of passion.

“For her sake,” he said, “I will fight for my life. At the worst, I have two years before me. They shall be two years of heaven on earth and for that I will put in jeopardy any other heaven.”

He placed his *bravi* at my service. Desperate outlaws they were, and late one night I sent a message to Francesco entreating him to meet me at a certain lonely spot on Monte Cavallo. I wrote that I was in sore trouble, having killed a man (which was but anticipating the truth by a few hours), and I begged him for the love he bore my sister not to fail me in this sore trouble. That brought him. I do not know whether Vittoria suspected that it was a trap. She had no certain knowledge of it, and I was likely enough to be in trouble and to need assistance. So she gave her husband no warning, and from my ambush behind the wall I shot him in the back, and the others finished him with their daggers.

Then I hastened to his home and told Vittoria and her mother, who was with her, what I had done at the Duke's orders; and how he was waiting with a priest to marry her at his villa of Magnanapolia. She was horror-

stricken, but I played upon her fears and those of my mother, how she would certainly be charged with the murder,—for the man who had brought Francesco my note was taken by the authorities and would testify that she had sent her husband to his death,—and in this whirlpool of contending emotions she fainted.

Then I ran to the Orsini stables for one of the Duke's coaches, and my mother and I took her all unconscious as she was to the Duke. But once with him love had its way and they were wedded, as I had planned. With her marriage Vittoria was a changed woman; no longer timid or doubtful where her allegiance lay, she was from that hour forward every inch the Duchess, nor did the Duke ever feel that he had been trapped but loved her to his death with ever-increasing intensity.

True there was one moment when I gave up all for lost, when, hue and cry being made in Rome, Pope Gregory threatened the Duke with excommunication if he did not put away this murderess, as they confidently called her.

She saw him blanch, for his malady had become hopeless and he believed himself in danger of eternal damnation. Then, though Vittoria knew that even in face of that dire

penalty he would in no wise desert her, yet she saw as clearly that only by some supreme magnanimity could she maintain her empire over his spirit, and taking a sudden resolve, she wrote a letter of farewell, explaining that she preferred his happiness to her own and fled from the villa.

She remained in hiding not long, but was presently tracked by the agents of Pope Gregory, imprisoned in St. Angelo, and put upon trial. Of her dauntless behaviour during those long proceedings needs not that I make mention here, save to recall that the ablest jurists were confounded, not being able to agree among themselves whether such assurance were an indication of innocence or of brazen effrontery.

With all their subtlety they could not entrap her into admission of her guilt, and, there appearing no clear evidence against her, were forced to bring in a verdict of "charges not proven."

The Pope indeed reprimanded her for so incontinently seeking the protection of the Duke and thus exposing herself to the suspicion of complicity in her husband's death, and bade her put aside her rich attire, robe herself in widows' weeds, and return to the house

of the Cardinal di Montalto, if he were willing to receive her.

Her answer, that she was no longer a widow but a bride, and would in no wise part from the jewels and magnificent robes which were the gifts of her husband, and becoming her state as a duchess, so delighted the Duke of Bracciano, when it was reported to us, that he swore that, though all the angels of heaven and the fiends of hell should league together to oppose him, still would he carry her off nor suffer himself to be again parted from her.

Thus it happened that when she was shut up in a convent devoted to penitent magdalens the Duke himself one night appeared at its gates at the head of a troop of horse, and commanded the nuns to give her up under penalty of having their walls battered down upon their heads. This time we took her of her own free will to the castle of Bracciano, and put it in a state of defence against a siege. And siege there might have been had not the Cardinal di Montalto besought the Pope not to avenge his nephew's death, and so won the reputation of a marvel of forgiveness.

So loudly did he proclaim his satisfaction that the trial had proved her innocent, that

the Duke of Bracciano was deceived and, believing that the Cardinal was a weak creature in no way to be considered, at length entirely cast aside his fears and on the death of Pope Gregory ventured to return to Rome and to establish himself in the Orsini palace.

The chief topic now upon men's tongues was the election of a new pope. The Duke trusted that the Cardinal Ferdinand de' Medici would be chosen, for though there was no love lost between them, they were bound together by their complicity in the slaying of the Duke's former wife, and this dreadful communism made each fear the other too much to in any way offend him. The cardinals were shut up in the secret conclave, but each night I repaired to the ante-chamber and received commissions from Ferdinand, between the lines of which the progress of the election was written in sympathetic ink for the Duke of Bracciano.

The Cardinal de' Medici led from the first polling, but Cardinal Farnese had so large and so persistent a following that it was impossible for de' Medici to obtain the two-thirds of the votes necessary for election.

Other candidates dropped out, swelling the Medicean majority, but not affecting the result, and the smoke rising from the altar,



CASTLE OF BRACCIANO



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where the ballots were burned after each uneventful scrutiny, told that Farnese had not relinquished hope. Among the candidates who had received scattering votes was Montalto. We had laughed when we learned the trifling number which he could command. "Why does he allow his friends to make him ridiculous by this absurd rivalry?" Vittoria asked.

"In order to sell his votes in the end to the highest bidder," I replied, but his game was deeper than I guessed. The Duke of Bracciano was confident that his brother-in-law would win in the end. "Two Medicis have been popes already," he declared, "and the family will continue to sit in St. Peter's chair." So assured was he that he felt the time had come to establish the legitimacy of his marriage with Vittoria by causing the ceremony to be performed publicly, and he invited the nobility of Rome to the wedding festivities at the Orsini palace.

It was the night of the final voting. The score when last reported had stood:

Medici	40
Farnese	22
Montalto	8

"Do you not see," the Duke of Bracciano

had said, "at the next polling Montalto will persuade his constituents to vote for Ferdinand and he will be Pope?"

The guests were seated at the banquet but one hour after the marriage service when I burst into the hall with the fatal news that Cardinal di Montalto had received the entire seventy votes, and was in consequence unanimously elected. No one could believe me, nevertheless it was true.

The old fox had held out obstinately playing friendship with both de' Medici and Farnese, but refusing to surrender his minority to either, and these inveterate enemies, rather than see the other in power, had compromised upon Montalto.

We were thunder-struck, for we knew that there was no forgiveness in that iron heart, and, on learning his threat that he had but waived his revenge as Cardinal to execute it more heavily as Pope, we fled incontinently from Rome. Placing ourselves under the protection of the Republic of Venice we established our residence in the palace of the Foscari, opposite the arena in the city of Padua.

But the hand of God was heavy upon the Duke, for his time had come to die, and there was scarce any respite in his agony.

My sister would not recognise the truth. She believed that it was the summer heat which affected him, and that a change from the city to the coolness of the Alpine slopes would bring recovery, and having been sent to negotiate for some villa, I chose that of the Martinengos at Salo upon Lake Garda.

"It is as beautiful in its way as Cardinal di Gambara's villa, where we first met," she said to the Duke when she saw my choice.

"This place is hell! Take me away!" she cried a few days later when the Duke died in her arms. And this was not because she saw herself left unprotected among enemies; but because in spite of the sin and suffering which they had caused each other, perhaps in consequence of it (for, look you, love is a strange matter, and sometimes sent I think in retribution for our wickedness), these two to their eternal misery loved one another.

I took her back to the palace which the Duke had given her at Padua, and to cheer her sent for our youngest brother, Flaminio, who was a merry-hearted boy and sang and played most sweetly upon the lute. But to Padua came speedily the Duke of Bracciano's nearest kinsman, Count Ludovico Orsini, executor of the estate.

He brought with him some forty of his friends and retainers, as formidable a troop of cut-throats as I have ever seen. I felt a sickness at my stomach as they rode slowly by our palace one morning, all staring at its windows, and I sent an express to the castle of Bracciano demanding that the Duke's *bravi* be sent to Padua for the protection of the Duchess—a futile precaution, for ere the summons reached them that had happened which was fated to happen, and they arrived not even in time to take part in her avenging.

In the meantime Count Ludovico hired a castle in the suburbs which was accounted the strongest near Padua for the entertainment of his friends, an equally fatuous proceeding on his part as the end showed.

The Count hated my sister, for he had been a lover of the Duke's first wife, and he believed Vittoria accountable for her murder. Therefore when the will was read and he (who had counted on a fat inheritance) found that the Duke had left her all of his disposable property, the face of Count Ludovico grew very black indeed.

Nevertheless he bowed himself from that interview with the men of law saying only, "I wish you the same enjoyment of your estates,

fair Cousin, that the Lady Jezebel took in the vineyard of Naboth."

"What does he mean, and who was this Signora Jezebel?" my sister asked.

"You a cardinal's niece and not to know that," laughed Flaminio, and he told the gruesome story. It left me depressed; but Vittoria woke to something of her old whimsical gaiety.

"And so there was nothing left of her but her little hands," she said. "Why would not the dogs eat them, I wonder," and holding her own heavily laden with jewels, she answered her own question: "Ah! I know, her rings scratched their mouths," and with that she burst into eerie laughter. But her mood changed presently. Indeed the same premonition of evil settled upon us all, and after supper she would have Flaminio sing and play upon the lute.

He, poor boy, chose, above all things, the *Miserere*. He was singing it as divinely as when a chorister, when there came a sudden tumult at the gate. "Flee with me," I cried, and sprang to the secret staircase. Vittoria followed me but faltered on the threshold. "There may be no need," she said, and let fall the arras.

The words were scarce out of her mouth

when Count Ludovico was in the ante-chamber with his assassins. I heard Flaminio's screams, and through a rent in the tapestry saw him fling himself wounded at our sister's feet as she knelt before her crucifix.

Then the entire gang were upon them both, and the blows rained with taunts and curses. Seventy-four stabs they counted in Flaminio's body, though Vittoria strove to shelter him with her own. "I pardon you," were the only words she uttered as Ludovico struck home, and from her knees she nestled down gently till her head drooped upon her brother's shoulder.

All the world knows how the next day the very rabble of Padua, strangers to her in life, thronging the church of the Ermitani where she lay upon the same bier with Flaminio, were filled, as they gazed upon her beautiful dead face, with such love and rage that they gnashed their teeth in fury, and rushed in a body to the assault of Ludovico's castle, dragging him and his forty *bravi* forth to their death.

This is my confession so far as it regards my sister. How the Pope demanded that I be sent to Rome to be tried for his nephew's murder, how I wandered in dreadful straits



TWIN PAVILIONS AT VILLA LANTE
Near Viterbo

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from place to place and came one day to the castle of Bracciano and was refused admission by the very men whom I had commanded in the old days, in no way concerns his Holiness, to whom I am less than a worm of the dust; but even at this pass my spirit was unbroken, and I might never have fallen into his power had not my evil genius led me past the villa at whose high festival all our troubles had their birth. As I peered between the bars of the grille, looking for some undergardener who might grant me shelter, I beheld, as in a dream, a twin pavilion to that of Cardinal di Gambara, such as Montalto had promised one day to erect for his nephew and for Vittoria, and in the lower pleasance, where the water garden repeats the arabesques of the parterre, there rose a magnificent fountain, four athletes holding high above their heads the star-crowned mountains of the Montaltos, and the old Cardinal himself (Cardinal no longer but Pope) came from one of the pavilions and we looked each other in the face. Then a trembling seized my limbs and I gripped the iron bars of the gate for support for I thought that I had gone mad and that what I saw was the glamour of delirium.

It was no hallucination, however, for his

Holiness raised his hand and his guards seized me.

I make no complaint. I suffer justly, and to-morrow I shall be in hell. Shall I find my sister's soul there, all the beautiful body that hid it burned away, and hideous in its naked wickedness? Or, knowing evil only from having been sinned against, will it lean with divine pity to look for me from the walls of Paradise? So much, even if innocent, she can not refuse me—for I loved her.



CHAPTER III

THE FRESCOES OF VILLA LEMMI

[Giambattista Grosso, a stone-mason, who assisted in removing the frescoes at the time that they were acquired for the collection of the Louvre, asserts that he discovered this manuscript imbedded in the plaster. He admits that his reason for not disclosing his treasure-trove on the spot was the hope of disposing of it later for money, a transaction which he has hitherto been unable to effect.]

I

I, LORENZO TORNABUONI, and my wife, Giovanna, on our wedding-day deposit these papers in this little niche in the wall of our villa of Lemmi to certify that the decorations on the aforesaid wall are from the hand of the worshipful master Sandro Botticelli; and that the title to the villa, long disputed by our several families, has been

confirmed by them in our joint possession and to the elucidation of these matters the following brief relation is hereto appended.

I am a quiet man, by predilection a scholar, by training a financier, and if I have been caught in that whirlpool of political events which so violently agitates Florence in this year of grace 1486 it will be seen that this was not of my own seeking, the more especially that its currents tore me relentlessly from my beloved, and but for a mysterious undertow, which even now I can not fully understand, but which my wife, more devout than I, names God's providence, we could never have found each other.

We had no hope in loving from the first, for Giovanna was daughter of the proud house of Albizzi, so many years the hereditary foes of the Medicis, whom they pretended to despise but feared. Upon me as cousin of Lorenzo the Magnificent, they naturally looked with suspicion, while in my proper estate as the son of a plebian though wealthy banker I was beneath their notice.

On the other hand, the barriers with which my own family hedged me in were as hopeless as those with which the Albizzis barred me out. I well remember the first day that I took their measure. I had ridden to the villa of Careggi



Giovanna Tornabuoni

From Botticelli's *Frescoes* in the Villa Lemmi, now in the Louvre

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to pay my respects to my cousin, and had found him in a towering passion, and all because his favourite painter, Sandro Botticelli, had undertaken to make a wall decoration in a little villa belonging to the Albizzis.

"Is it not enough, Sandro," asked Lorenzo de' Medici, "that I have made you my accredited painter, showering my benefits upon you and establishing your reputation, that you should take service with the avowed enemies of my house, with the son of the man who caused my grandfather, the great Cosimo, to be banished from Florence, under a charge of bribery and corruption?"

"Proud as Rinato degli Albizzi was of his noble birth he found it of no avail in the struggle for popularity. The people of Florence called back the man whom he had stigmatised as a 'base-born demagogue' and styled him 'Father of his Country,' and they have made me their uncrowned King.

"I have followed my grandfather's example in magnanimity to the nobles. He made the Pazzi honorary members of the bankers' guild, that they might share in the political privileges restricted to working citizens, and I have given my sister Bianca in marriage to Gulielmo Pazzi, the best of the brothers. Have

I secured their gratitude by this clemency? Not at all. Francesco Pazzi has opened a rival banking house in Rome and has wormed himself into the friendship of the Pope so that Sixtus has removed the papal revenues from our bank and deposited them with the Pazzi. I will make those upstarts regret the day that they attempted to rival me, and I have made my last attempt at conciliating arrogant nobles. The Albizzis refused to honour my invitation to my sister's wedding, the Signora declaring that she would never enter the house of a politician who bought his popularity by the distribution of spoils.

"I will insult her family in no such way. This very Villa Lemmi, on whose walls her husband has asked you to paint the portrait of his daughter, belongs not to Albizzi but to me.

"When my grandfather was banished that land was a part of his confiscated property, bought in by Rinato degli Albizzi. On Cosimo de' Medici's return his estates were restored to him, but he nobly waived his right to this land as Rinato had built a villa upon it. There was no written deed delivered, the ground is mine and the improvements he has added; and I hereby give the estate of Lemmi to you,

Cousin Lorenzo Tornabuoni, and desire you to take possession forthwith."

I demurred, but what could one do against the will of the Magnificent? He ruled his family as he did Florence for its good, but his rule was absolute.

"Sandro," he continued, addressing the painter who had listened ill at ease, "since Albizzi desires you to decorate the Villa Lemmi continue your work; but let there be no more portraits of his family. Instead paint my cousin, the rightful owner of the villa, with all due insignia and allegorical personages. He has lately been made Doctor of Philosophy by the University of Bologna, therefore depict him presented to the fair muse of philosophy by the other liberal arts, whose master he is.

"Would that I might be present when Albizzi comes to inspect your work, for that will be the proper moment to announce to him that I have no mind to cede my rights over my domains and still less over your talent. Go, Cousin Lorenzo, to the villa with Sandro, for I would have my designs put into execution at once."

As we rode together I knew not which was the more cast down, the painter Botticelli or myself. I saw his trouble and to save him

annoyance I would gladly have relinquished this unsought-for property if it had been in my power, and so I told him.

"I believe your Excellency," he replied, "and even if you were not minded to do it for my sake you would for the fair daughter of my would-be patron, for it was her beauty which drew me into this coil. I, who had a haunting fear from the first of the consequences, for I foresaw that the Magnificent would not brook divided service."

"I have been wondering," I replied, "at your temerity. Tell me how you came to commit so great a blunder, and to involve us both in such an unpleasant predicament."

"Vision of Venus," he replied, "I have told you already, it was the pursuit of beauty, to which we artists are pledged by a higher law than that of loyalty to a patron however munificent. Could a man with the eyes of a painter refuse such a commission? Not since I painted the divine Simonetta have I seen such loveliness, though it is of a different stamp from hers, for Giovanna degli Albizzi is an angel such as Fra Angelico dreamed. A milky-veined blonde, with hair of the pale yellow of aureoles, and skin so white and transparent that when the rare colour suffuses her



LOGGIA AND TOWER OF CATERINA CORNARO AT ASOLO



GUINIGI PALACE AND TOWER AT LUCCA

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cheek it is as though the light of a lamp shone through alabaster. Ah! she is fashioned of finer clay than ordinary mortals and the soul which looks from her steadfast eyes and speaks from her lips is as innocent as childhood, as pure as one of the beatified."

"You are an enthusiast, Sandro," I said passing my arm through his, "and it is given you to see differently from other men. The beauty of your own imagination transfigures your models. I wonder not that Albizzi sought you out to hand down to posterity a flattering presentment of his daughter."

So I spoke and so I thought when I stood before Botticelli's fresco at the Villa Lemmi. It even seemed to me that the painter had consciously used a clever artifice, that of contrast, to enhance the somewhat colourless simplicity of this fair maid. He had represented her as receiving the homage of the Graces or the Virtues, certain buxom sylphs depicted in Botticelli's well-known manner, with fluttering draperies and easy attitudes, their red gold hair bound with pearls and their rounded bosoms and cheeks under which the warm blood ran riot expressive of abundant health and joy in life.

But the lady to whom they brought their

offerings was straight and slender as a reed, and quaintly robed in a stiff russet gown, too old in its matronly severity for her girlish figure. It fell foldless to her feet, without lace or ornament of any kind, save a string of pearls at her throat, and her abundant hair was modestly hidden under a white veil. All this prudery of costume accentuated the spirituality of the pure face, one that could never mask an evil thought and was almost too refined for the joys of our common humanity.

I shrugged my shoulders. "A saint I grant you," I said, "but likewise something of a bigot, is she not, my good Sandro? A being to merit a man's admiration but not like Simonetta to compel his love."

I could have bitten my tongue dumb for this disparagement, for even as I spoke the fair Giovanna entered the room and I understood how Dante wrote of Beatrice:

Benignly clothed in sweet humility,
She giveth such delight to her beloved;
The subtle charm of whose intensity
No one can understand who hath not proved.

Following her were her father and mother. The Signor Albizzi had fortunately not overheard my ill-considered remark, and he stood for a moment unmindful of my presence as

wrapt in admiration of the painting as I of its original. His keen-eyed lady, absorbed by no such emotions, marked me as I stood staring at her daughter, and with natural curiosity demanded an explanation of my presence.

"Your Excellencies will pardon me," Sandro stuttered forth, "this is but an apprentice for whose assistance I crave permission."

"It is granted," Albizzi replied graciously, "and the more willingly that I judge from his intelligent face he hath talent to profit by the privilege of watching the strokes of your miraculous brush."

Sandro's lie was a surprise to me, but it was told and it furnished the pretext on which I accompanied the painter to the villa on each of his visits, and he trusted that in gratitude I would find a way to placate Lorenzo de' Medici without offending Albizzi, and so rescue him from the awkward consequences of his attempt to serve two masters.

I troubled myself not one whit about his predicament, for I was in a worse case, having fallen incontinently in love at first sight with the fair Giovanna.

The Signor Albizzi liked me from the first, and treated me with a courtesy devoid of the

slightest taint of distrust or of condescension, but in the Signora I saw that I had a suspicious and clever observer ready to turn into an arrogant and spiteful antagonist.

The Signor came and went, but the Signora Albizzi was always on guard. She had heard my unfortunate comparison of Giovanna with the beautiful Genoese Simonetta Vespucci who had taken captive the eyes of all Florence, and whose pathetic, early death had as strongly moved our hearts, and she was so jealous for her daughter, that she could not forbear calling to account even so insignificant a personage as myself for this slight.

"You seem, young man, to set yourself up as a connoisseur in female loveliness," she said to me one day when Sandro at some little distance was so intoxicated by the divine phrensy of his work that he paid no attention to what we were saying.

I disclaimed vehemently such pretensions, but she silenced me promptly by quoting my own words: "And now I would have you explain to me," she commanded, "what there was in this foreign coquette which turned the heads of all our young men."

"Did you not see her," I asked, "in the pageant which Lorenzo de' Medici gave in the



GIULIANO DE' MEDICI
Botticelli



SIMONETTA VESPUCCI
Antonio Pollaiuolo. From the collection of the Duc d' Aumale
at Chantilly



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Piazza of Santa Croce in honour of his brother Giuliano, where she enacted the part of the Goddess of Beauty?"

"No," replied the Signora drily, "the invitations to Giuliano de' Medici's tournament were too indiscriminate, and I missed the occasion to see his fair innamorata. Poor girl, she paid dearly for her vanity, for her death resulted from the cold which she took in consequence of parading her charms in such flimsy draperies. As you may well imagine I have never seen the interior of Lorenzo de' Medici's palatial Villa of Careggi. Is it true that Simonetta was so shameless as to allow a nude portrait to be made of herself for its decoration?"

I flushed with indignation for I knew that this lovable girl was guilty of no wrong except a too confiding love for my cousin, Giuliano. It was an open secret that he had loved the Bella Simonetta, and that it was his selfish importunity which had persuaded her to allow Botticelli to immortalise her beauty in his masterpiece, now known as the *Birth of Venus*. It was not until after Simonetta's death that Giuliano allowed his brother, who highly valued this painting, to exhibit it publicly. I tried to explain this to the Signora Albizzi but

she affected to be greatly scandalised by the entire affair. It was quite what one would have expected of a sensualist like Giuliano, she declared, but what astonished her was that a noble and respectable gentleman like Francesco Pazzi should have also been infatuated by this graceless hussy.

I was not more pleased at hearing my cousin compared to his disadvantage with such a villain as Francesco afterwards proved himself, and as I even then suspected him to be, than I had been by her disparagement of Simonetta, and, forgetting the part that I was playing, I spoke rather too warmly my opinion of Pazzi's underhand practices.

"It seems to me, young man," said the Signora maliciously, "that for an artist's apprentice, you are uncommonly well-posted in the departments of finance and diplomacy."

How I hated myself for my stupidity and her for her quickness. The repugnance I bore her was almost enough to reconcile me to the thought of never winning Giovanna. "If you were my mother-in-law," I said to myself, "I should kill you, I should certainly kill you," and aloud I explained that I had served for a short time as clerk in a banking house.

She looked at me shrewdly but pleasantly.

"I have no objection, to moderate ability in money-matters even in a noble," she said patronisingly. "This is what I admire in Francesco Pazzi, and what you have just said raises him in my regard. It shows that his grief over the death of the Simonetta has not entirely crazed him. A man who can play so shrewd a trick as that you speak of and hold his own with so formidable an antagonist as Lorenzo de' Medici, must have a sound head as well as a sound heart."

Giovanna had taken no part in this conversation but that she heard it her changing colour and certain expressive glances abundantly proved. A little later, when her mother was haranguing Sandro, as one who would teach him the laws of painting, she said to me very quietly:

"If you can reach the ear of Lorenzo de' Medici tell him to beware of angering further Francesco Pazzi—he is a dangerous man."

"And what has Lorenzo de' Medici ever done to incur his ill-will?" I asked.

"Lorenzo? Nothing except to be successful where our family and the Pazzis have failed. Think you, that it is nothing for the old patricians to see the reins of power seized by a plebian, and to be surpassed by him, not

alone in wealth but in magnificence, in culture, and in all the social graces? These are Lorenzo's sins, and Giuliano has touched him more nearly, for as my mother told you, Francesco Pazzi loved this Simonetta of whom you were speaking, who rejected him for love of Giuliano. Francesco will never forgive him for that and because he thinks Giuliano accountable for her death. If opportunity favours he will certainly kill him."

"But if rumour has any foundation," I made bold to retort, "Francesco's heart-hurt has been quickly and soundly healed, for he is your accredited suitor, Sweet Lady."

Her cheek burned as I had never seen it. "That is not true," she said, "at least if true, he loves me not, for his heart is in Simonetta's grave, and he seeks alliance with our family only because he thinks that together we can overthrow the power of the Medici. Be sure that I will be the seal on no such compact. I fear Francesco Pazzi, but I would fear him still more as his wife. I know not what will become of me or of my father, for his revenge is relentless when his desires are thwarted, but I shall never marry him."

My heart was light at this, and even the knowledge that our family had a ruthless

enemy in Francesco Pazzi seemed to me of no account, since Giovanna loved him not. Perhaps I might win her in my proper person, and this hope made me oblivious of all other considerations. But I could not speak further with her at this time for her father joined us and the Signora turned to us remarking: "Messer Sandro has been telling me how much his friend and fellow-artist, Del Ghirlandajo envies him his good fortune in painting our daughter, whom he has noted at church and greatly admires."

"Messer Ghirlandajo has no reason to envy any one of his craft," said the Signor Albizzi, "for he has recently received the commission to decorate the choir of the church of Santa Maria Novella for the wealthy banker Tornabuoni, uncle of Lorenzo de' Medici."

"I thought the choir had long ago been assigned to the Ricci as their family chapel," said the Signora.

"True," replied her husband, "and thereby hangs a tale. The Riccis' fortunes having diminished they were not able to keep their chapel in suitable repair. Its walls were smoked and notoriously shabby. Now Tornabuoni being a parvenu had no ancestral chapel like the nobles of Florence, and of course en-

vied us that privilege. He accordingly drove a bargain with the Riccis, offering to have the choir of Santa Maria Novella decorated in the best manner in return for permission to worship there. The Riccis consented, stipulating only that their coat of arms should appear in the most honourable position possible. Now the joke is upon them, for that trickster Tornabuoni caused Ghirlandajo to fill the walls with portraits of his own family, brought in as visitors congratulating Saint Elizabeth on the birth of John the Baptist, and the Riccis were unable to discover their insigni in any part of the chapel. But when they loudly complained of this, Tornabuoni showed them the little tabernacle on the altar, where, in a space no larger than the palm of my hand, their escutcheon was indeed represented. The Riccis, poor things, were silenced, for though this place was so obscure that the blazon was undiscoverable, still the tiny tabernacle, *being the shelter of the host*, was indeed the most honourable spot in the chapel, and Tornabuoni had fulfilled his part of the bargain."

The laughter of the two Albizzis at my father's trickery angered me almost past endurance, as also did the Signora's added insult that whatever might be the pecuniary advan-



GIOVANNA TORNABUONI
From the "Visitation of St. Elizabeth" by Ghirlandaio

YOU

tage to Ghirlandajo he was still to be pitied, for the Tornabuonis were a notoriously ill-favoured lot, not one of the family having any distinction of feature or bearing, and that with only such models at his command these John the Baptist frescoes must have the appearance of a collection of harpies and monsters.

The hope that I had cherished but a moment before, that a connection with the Tornabuonis might not seem to the Albizzis preposterous, was dashed to the ground and I wondered if I were indeed such a fright in Giovanna's eyes as my relatives seemed to her mother.

This is but a typical record of the conversations held in the Villa Lemmi while Botticelli painted; but it will serve to show how my love was fed and grew by my daily intercourse with Giovanna.

In all this time not a word was spoken concerning the matter on which Lorenzo de' Medici had sent me to the villa, but calling upon him it may be a month after I had received his instructions, he asked how the painting which he had commanded was progressing. He was vexed with me when I told him that Sandro had not even begun it, for he believed that I had not taken the time to afford him the necessary sittings.

“Bestir yourself, Cousin,” he said, “for I am resolved to show my hand boldly and let these arrogant aristocrats know that I am not a man to be trifled with. I hear that Francesco Pazzi is paying his suit to Albizzi’s daughter, and I know what that combination means; the Pazzis need the prestige of the Albizzis, who alone have been able to rival our family in politics, and the Albizzis need money and believe the Pazzi to be the richest of the nobles. But I have found a way to cripple the finances of their banking house. Their entire capital is derived from the fortune of Giovanni Pazzi, Francesco’s brother, who married the heiress of that immensely wealthy Borromeo. I have caused the Signoria to recast the law of inheritance so that when a man dies leaving no son his fortune shall pass to his nearest male relative. Therefore Giovanni Pazzi will now be obliged to give up every cent of his wife’s dowry to her cousin, my good friend Borromeo. This in connection with the heavy loans which they have advanced Girolamo Riario may force them to go into bankruptcy.”

Having in mind Giovanna’s warning I begged my cousin not to press the Pazzis too far; but I could not give my reasons, and

though Giuliano de' Medici also urged his brother to pursue a policy of conciliation, confessing frankly that he had been Francesco's successful rival in Simonetta's affection, and for that reason was desirous of not treating him ungenerously, Lorenzo for once put his brother's desires aside and so committed the greatest mistake of his life.

"And now," said the Magnificent, addressing me, "I desire that during the next month Sandro shall complete the fresco which I ordered, and when it is finished I will visit the villa and announce to the Albizzis my determination to maintain my right to that piece of property, which I have already settled upon you, and I swear to you that from this decision I shall not change."

It will thus be seen that Sandro and I had gained naught save a short delay in time, and perceiving the evil day of general enlightenment approaching we were in a state of great perturbation.

Willingly as I would have aided him I could see no way out of the coil, and Botticelli was obliged to trust to his own wits. These, as my story will demonstrate, did not desert him, for, having now completed the fresco representing the Graces presenting their gifts to

Giovanna, he asked Signor Albizzi what were his designs concerning the opposite wall.

"I have none at present," he replied. "I intend this villa to be part of my daughter's marriage portion. I still hope that she will look with favour upon Francesco Pazzi, though she has some unaccountable objection which I believe he will be able to overcome. If he succeeds it is his portrait, with proper allegorical devices, which I shall commission you to paint as a companion piece to the one already executed; but this work must be delayed until Giovanna yields her consent to the betrothal."

It was then that a sudden inspiration came to Sandro.

Since, as he explained to his patron, he had now a little unwonted leisure upon his hands, but might at any time be called away by the Magnificent to undertake other commissions, why not at once begin to cover the unpainted wall with a composition which would be representative of Giovanna's husband, whoever this happy man might eventually be? It was inconceivable that so charming a lady should not marry a gentleman of breeding and of culture, therefore it was easy to choose suitable allegorical personages. The figure of the bridegroom himself could be indicated in the

Lorenzo Tornabuoni and the Arts and
Sciences

From Botticelli's Frescoes in the Villa Lemmi, now in the Louvre

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vaguest way, and the portrait could be finished from life at short notice.

Albizzi accepted this proposition with alacrity. "I trust that I may have the satisfaction of seeing Francesco Pazzi's portrait there," he said, "and that this unfinished figure marring your beautiful composition may appeal to my daughter more eloquently than words to delay no longer the realisation of my hopes and her own happiness."

The carrying out of this idea had exactly the opposite effect upon Giovanna. Her first inkling of the scheme was on discovering the wall filled with sketches of the seven liberal arts, which Botticelli had rapidly indicated in charcoal.

"So," she exclaimed, "I am to be disposed of with no deference whatever to my own feelings."

"Not at all, Sweet Lady," I replied, "explaining her father's promise that the principal figure was to be of her own free choosing."

"Since I have but one suitor," she replied, "this is but unkind sarcasm."

Now such a retort could but act on the mind of a lover as a challenge, and as it happened that Botticelli was late that morning and the Signora having loitered in the garden to give

orders for the planting of certain shrubberies, we were for a wonder alone, and I wasted no time to rescue Giovanna from the delusion that she had but one suitor.

"And now, Beloved," she said, "you must acknowledge to my father that you are not what you seem."

"What!" I exclaimed, "you know who I am? Botticelli has then betrayed me?"

"In no wise," she answered, "but I know of my own discernment what you are not, and that is a painter's apprentice, for you have demonstrated more than a hundred times your indifference to art and your ignorance of its methods. I am amazed that my mother, who is so clever, has not suspected your disguise."

"Dearest," I said, "I would gladly dispense with all deceit but I am not a noble, and your parents would never accept me as their son-in-law, for I am of the family that they hate most in Florence. This is the third generation in which our hereditary feud has been fought. In your grandfather's time he held the winning cards, but now luck has changed, and, though your father could be magnanimous to a conquered enemy, I fear he could not forgive a successful one."

"You are a Medici," she exclaimed in sud-

den fear,—“Are you that wicked and handsome Giuliano, brother of the Magnificent?”

“Nay,” I replied with a smile, “I am only his cousin, one of those honest and ill-favoured Tornabuoni at whom you were scoffing the other day.” With that her alarm changed to confusion, and she blushing declared that we had been maligned, for even her mother had declared that I was as pretty a figure of a man as she had ever seen.

The Signora coming in with Botticelli at that moment overheard the remark.

“Tut, tut!” she exclaimed, “what is the occasion of this unmaidenly flattery?”

And Giovanna, meek as she had seemed, answered undismayed: “I have been striving, my mother, to persuade this gentleman to pose for the chief personage in Messer Sandro’s new painting.”

“What, as your future husband?” the Signora cried in dismay.

“Why not?” asked Giovanna, “we shall then have the satisfaction of seeing the picture completed. It would be a great calamity if anything should happen to our esteemed artist before my bridegroom is determined upon, and his masterpiece left for ever unfinished.”

“The Signorina is right,” replied the

painter. "My apprentice has often served me as a model. The face moreover can be changed at any time."

The Signora Albizzi gave me a searching look. "His figure is good," she said drily, "but the face does not altogether please me. You may leave that unpainted, Messer Sandro, until further orders from my husband."

Thus while trembling on account of the fear of expulsion by the parents, and rejoicing in the assurance of the love of Giovanna, my daily visits to the Villa Lemmi continued for some time longer, while the painting progressed toward completion with a speed which seemed to me little other than diabolical.

There were not wanting other circumstances to mar my happiness. On one occasion Francesco Pazzi came to the villa with the Albizzis to inspect the frescoes. He did not at first mark me, for I kept my back to him feigning to be occupied in cleansing Sandro's brushes and looking for some opportunity when the party should have left the part of the room near the door to make good my escape. His attention was of course at first attracted to the painting which depicted Giovanna, and for this he had naught but the highest praise. Signor Albizzi next explained the import of

the companion fresco. "Happy the man," said Pazzi, "who shall have the good fortune to see himself portrayed in this company. But how is this, my friends, that the portrait is already begun?"

Albizzi explained Botticelli's scheme, but Francesco seemed not well pleased.

"Our painter's ideal of manly beauty appears to me of a somewhat insignificant type," he said sneeringly, ruffling himself at the same time like a turkey-cock; for the Pazzis were all burly as peasants, whereas we Tornabuonis are slight though enduring and with nerves like steel.

"Messer Sandro has made use for the nonce of his favourite model," the Signora explained with a wave of her hand in my direction. But as she spoke I slipped through the open door and was off like a hare, not however so quickly as to miss hearing Pazzi's query: 'T is a strangely familiar face; where have I seen that young man before?"

The next day I found my beloved troubled. There were rings about her gentle eyes, showing that she had not slept, and her mother, who arrived first at the villa to inspect the progress of the painting, was even more querulous than usual.

"Why have you come, Giovanna?" she demanded snappishly, "your duties as model are over, and you can safely leave Messer Sandro the task of completing his work under my supervision."

Giovanna's only reply was an appealing glance to me, and when her mother's attention was diverted she slipped a note under Botticelli's paint-box and stole quietly away.

The Signora, captious and domineering, found fault with the painting as she had never done before, and especially with the figure for which I had posed. "Francesco was right," she said, "it is too diminutive, give it more the stature of Francesco Pazzi, and among these allegorical ladies introduce one holding a helmet and a shield, to indicate that my future son-in-law has made himself famous in the arts of war as well as in those of peace."

Botticelli was thunder-struck, for this would have necessitated an entirely new composition, and I was equally so for I comprehended now the cause of Giovanna's unhappiness. Francesco Pazzi had been formally accepted by her parents as her future husband. But though this had been done with the consent of the Signora she was not thoroughly pleased. "What else will he demand?" she grumbled

"He is over-masterful methinks, for one whose future, as he confesses, is still in dubiety, depending upon the success of some desperate scheme which he has only half explained."

She bit her lips, realising doubtless that she had said too much and flounced angrily from the room. Incontinently I broke the seal of the letter which my darling had left me.

"Sweetheart," she wrote, "I am in sore trouble. My father commanded me in Francesco Pazzi's presence to recognize him as my betrothed. I refused to do so, and my mother, keen-witted as I told you she is, at once charged me with my love for you. 'I have all along suspected some intrigue,' she said, 'but, shameless girl, know you so much as who your lover is?'

"When I refused to answer Francesco exclaimed: 'There is no need, I caused the sneaking hound to be tracked. He is the base-born son of that swindling broker Tornabuoni, who with the help of the political influence of his demagogue cousin has played us a trick, which has placed our banking house in the direst straits.'

"'Then you are a ruined man?' my father asked.

‘No,’ thundered Francesco, ‘I have arranged a cabal by which the Medicis will be deposed never more to regain their power over the Signoria of Florence.’

“With that he went with my father into his private closet, where they talked long together. As they came forth I heard my father say: ‘I have your promise that there shall be no blood spilt. It must be a peaceful revolution.’

“But all last night the lamp burned in my father’s chamber, and when I saw him this morning I knew that he had not slept.

“So, dearest, make speed to warn your cousin of Francesco’s plots. But have no fear for me, for I will be ever your faithful

GIOVANNA.”

Scarcely had I finished reading this letter before I heard a great noise of horses and bustle of servitors without, and my magnificent cousin, Lorenzo, with his suite of poets and philosophers, were ushered into the room.

He approved of the general scheme of both of the frescoes and of the skilful execution, with which no one with any knowledge of painting could find fault. My own portrait though unfinished also pleased him, but when he turned to Giovanna’s he remarked, “So this is the little aristocrat. She is far prettier

than I had imagined an Albizzi could be. It is a pity that so lovely a work of art must be erased."

With that I cried out on the shame of effacing any creation of such a genius as Botticelli. "True," my cousin replied, "nevertheless it must be done, for I destine that place for the portrait of your future bride."

Then for once I stood up like a man before the will of the head of our house, the thought of how Giovanna had dared even more for my sake spurring me to emulation of her intrepidity.

"Since this is your wish, Cousin Lorenzo," I declared, "the painting shall remain as it is, for, by the Madonna, no other woman shall be my wife."

The Magnificent sat straighter than I had ever seen him, and regarded me with unfeigned astonishment. Then he broke into a laugh. "You are like then to remain a bachelor to the end of your days, for I will never consent to such a marriage. The chit is pretty enough now, in spite of her bleached hair, baby mouth, and washed-out complexion; but look at that vixenish old harridan, her mother, if you would know what she will be when she is forty. You will thank me one

day, Cousin, that I preserved you from such a fate," and with this ultimatum he swept from the villa, leaving me so excited by my own affairs that I clean forgot to tell him of Giovanna's warning.

There was a more astounding incident to follow, for as his cortège jingled away a door leading to the interior of the villa, which had stood ajar during this interview, was thrown violently open and the Signora Albizzi stood before us, furious at the insult put upon her. I have no desire to put on record or to remember her wild words, for she was beside herself for the moment, and this seemed to me but natural. I was surprised only that I came in for no share of her indignation, and that her passion having spent itself she closed her tirade with this remarkable declaration:

"It remains to be seen whether this tyrant can restrain the Albizzis from bestowing their daughter on whom they please. I am as incensed by his scorn of my daughter as I am by Francesco Pazzi's insolence in taking it for granted that we must forsooth give her to him, bully and dastard though I suspect him to be. I have a mind to thwart them both. Do not think, young man, that I did not long ago penetrate your flimsy disguise. Had I not

informed myself of your merits you would never have been permitted the opportunities you have enjoyed—especially when Giovanna's state of mind is so evident. You bearded your would-be master well just now, and if you have the strength of character to hold out in that defiance then I am with you, and our friend Sandro's frescoes shall not be spoiled at the bidding of Medici or Albizzi. They are good art as they stand, and you, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, are a good enough son-in-law for me!"

II

Much was to happen of public as well as of private import before I was to obtain this honour.

The Pazzi conspiracy is now a matter of history, and I need not dwell upon its well-known details. Francesco, ruined and desperate, drew into the plot for the assassination of my two cousins, all who had any grievances against the Medicis.

To insure free access to the persons of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici at some public function the young cardinal of San Giorgio, himself innocent of any knowledge of the end he served, was sent to Florence. Accepting

my cousin's hospitality he was sumptuously entertained at his town-house, and the occasion desired was afforded on the Sunday before Ascension when the Cardinal celebrated mass in the cathedral of Florence, and it was of course incumbent upon his host to attend him.

I dined with my cousins on that day but had decided not to go to the Duomo but to remain with Giuliano who was not well. I had my private reasons for this, for I wished his intercession with his brother in my love affairs. Giuliano heard me very kindly, and had just promised to use his influence in my behalf when Francesco Pazzi was announced. "What is he doing here?" I asked, "he hates us both, and with good reason, for you were his rival once and I am now."

"His visit shows that he harbours no grudge against me at least," said Giuliano. "My brother has treated him very harshly. I must meet his advances, and endeavour to win him over," and he ordered that Pazzi should be shown into the room. He tripped in jauntily, laughing and joking with the utmost friendliness, and insisted that Giuliano should go with him to the service at the cathedral.

"If we are seen publicly together it will give the lie to malicious tongues, which say

that there is some hard feeling between us," he urged, and he assisted Giuliano to put on his cloak embracing him with a great show of affection and at the same time tickling him playfully, and so ascertaining that the rumour that Giuliano wore a cuirass of chain mail beneath his doublet was false. My poor cousin did not even buckle on his dagger, but went out with the assassin unarmed.

"Will you not come with us cousin," Giuliano said to me, turning at the doorway; but as I had no love for his scowling companion and suspected nothing, I suffered him to go alone to his death.

He had scarcely left the palazzo when the major-domo came to say that a veiled lady, who would not give her name, had demanded wildly to see my cousins, and had been so seriously affected by the information that they had gone to the cathedral that he had asked whether I could be of service. With that she had cried out in great disorder that it was possible but to bid me for the love of Heaven to make no tarrying.

I descended at once, fearing I knew not what. Most likely, as I thought, to be confronted by some lady distracted with love for Giuliano, and I liked not to interfere in his

intrigues. What was my stupefaction when I found myself face to face with the Signora Albizzi.

"You here, dear Madam?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, it is I," she replied, "where I had never thought to set foot. But we Albizzis are not assassins nor confederates of assassins. There is a plot to murder your cousins in the cathedral. Francesco Pazzi endeavoured to draw my husband into it, and on his refusal dealt him such a blow that he lay senseless all the morning and has only just been able to tell me of the conspiracy. Fly, for it may be too late. Giovanna went to the cathedral when I came here, but she may not have been able to get near your cousins."

Calling to the major-domo to send help after me, and to secure the house against attack, I ran as swiftly as I could to the Duomo, entering by the north sacristy. From this room a staircase leads to the organ-loft, whence I hoped to get a general view of the interior of the church and so discover the whereabouts of my cousins. The Cardinal was saying mass at the high altar, and the bell tinkled announcing the elevation of the host. At that solemn instant a disturbance occurred on the north side of the choir, and I saw my cousin

Giuliano fall upon the pavement stabbed to the heart by Francesco Pazzi and by several others who flung themselves upon him. Then Pazzi ran around the choir toward the southern side of the church, and my startled vision out-going him, to see what led him in that direction, I recognized Lorenzo de' Medici, his head bent reverently in prayer.

"Lorenzo," I shouted, "look behind you!" and even as he turned to do so a priest at his side stabbed at his throat. He flung his assailant to the ground, and leaping the low railing which surrounds the choir, ran toward the door of the northern transept, near which, unknown to him, Giuliano lay dead surrounded by his murderers.

"Not that way!" I cried, "to the sacristy, the sacristy!" and leaping down the staircase I let him in and helped Politian bar the heavy bronze gates in the face of Francesco Pazzi. The villain knew himself foiled and fled with his confederates, and presently there were wild shouts and rough shaking and pounding of the gates, strong men endeavouring to force an entrance, not enemies but friends alarmed for the safety of their ruler and eager to defend him.

The Pazzis had counted on the rising of the lower ranks of society to hail them as their

liberators so soon as the rumour should have gone abroad that the Magnificent was dead. They rose indeed but not as these miscreants had hoped, for my cousin held the hearts of Florence, and a furious mob quickly filled the streets and howled for vengeance.

Francesco with every one of the ruffians, and many innocent persons implicated or merely suspected as accessories were hunted down and dragged to the Signory, who enacted swift justice upon all, hanging them from the windows of the Palazzo Publico. It was with the greatest difficulty that we succeeded in escorting the Cardinal of San Giorgio and Guglielmo Pazzi, Lorenzo's innocent brother-in-law, safely through the excited populace to the Medici palace. The Cardinal's hair turned white and he was a coward to his death.

The attempt to murder their idol brought out all the devotion of the Florentines for my cousins. Giuliano's faults were forgiven and only his best qualities remembered. No man more than he loved to be loved, and the regret uppermost in my mind was that he could not know how Florence adored him.

When, but a short time after these events, Lorenzo said to me: "I owe my escape to you,

Cousin Namesake; but what good chance or Providence stationed you in that organ-loft to spy and warn me of my danger?" then you may be sure I set the matter before him in its proper light.

"So," he said, "it is to the Signora Pazzi, the woman whom I deemed my enemy, that I owe my life? Since this is so, and to do me this kindness she renounced her expressed determination never to enter my house, I must endeavour not to be outdone in courtesy by her,—and I shall crave her pardon and retract the injurious words I used upon the occasion of my visit to your villa. This at least I obstinately insist upon: the villa is yours, Cousin Lorenzo, yours and your wife's if so be the Signor and Signora degli Albizzi will honour our house by making you happy.

"So let us to the Villa Lemmi and may God grant you there all the felicity which you deserve!"



CHAPTER IV

VILLAS OF THE MEDICIS

HARDLY a road radiating from Florence but will lead you sooner or later to some villa that was long ago a pleasure-palace of the Medicis.

The history of this wonderful family is written in stone in the city and its environs, and these enduring volumes furnish valuable commentaries and vivid illustrations to the musty pages of the chronicler.

They enlighten and explain; here an ancient tower tells how in feudal times these palaces were fortresses grimly defended or cruelly sacked by men who knew neither fear nor pity; again a pillared loggia is full of flickering shadows, the happy ghosts of gentle Platonists, poets, and artists and beautiful women who made merry here in the days of the Magnificent. Still again, an incredible tragedy becomes almost inevitable as we trace

A maze of corridors contrived for sin;
Dusk, winding stairs, dim galleries,
 . . . and more strange—
A recess lurking here behind a range
Of banquet-rooms. Your finger thus you push
A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
Upon the banqueters.

To the visitor endowed with a sympathetic imagination the centuries between that earlier time and ours vanish, and history becomes an evolution of entrancing tales, unfolding, blending, dissolving; but pulsing throughout with joy in life, with love, ambition, and the intenser passions of our common humanity.

There are hundreds of villas among the hills which girdle the City of Flowers that are as reminiscent of romantic incidents as those we have chosen; but precisely as the Medicis in continuous succession dominated their eras so are their homes pre-eminent in epitomising the sequence of great events.¹

The Medici Palace (now called the Palazzo Riccardi), within the city, for two centuries the cradle of the race, is too well-known to demand mention here, and though the stage setting of many important scenes in the

¹ This sequence will be best understood by a glance at the genealogical table of the elder and younger branches of the Medici subjoined to this chapter.

Medicean drama, as town-house of the family it lies outside the scope of the present volume.

During the first hundred years of the existence of this noble house from its building by Michelozzo in 1430 for Cosimo Pater Patria to the assassination of Duke Alessandro by Lorenzino, it was the theatre of the rise and decline of the elder branch, while its actors during the following century until the sale of the palazzo to the Riccardi family were the degenerate descendants of Cosimo's younger brother.

The first act of the drama is the more brilliant, for it includes the career of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who was born and maintained his court here.

There is no spot in Florence which gives a more vivid impression of the pomp which he maintained than its tiny chapel, whose insignificant size is expanded by Benozzo Gozzoli's frescoes of the Magi, in reality an interminable triumphal procession with Lorenzo as the principal figure, and a naïve representation of one of the pageants of his reign.

Cosimo is said to have wandered through his home in his old age reiterating sadly, "Too large a house for so small a family!" but his grandson Lorenzo was to find it too small for his needs, and it was during his life-



CAREGGI, VILLA MEDICI

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time that the Medicean villas attained the dimensions and state of palaces. Cosimo himself possessed four country seats, of which his favourite, and the one destined to become the most famous, was Careggi. Cosimo's enormous wealth (the Medici managed banking houses in sixteen European cities and lent money to kings and popes) was the cornerstone of the supremacy of his family. It was employed in securing political popularity and power, and many of the evils of our own day—rebates, grafting, and venality in the exercise of the ballot—were not unknown in that early republic. But Cosimo was more than a shrewd financier and demagogue, as the history of the Villa of Careggi amply demonstrates. Built by Michelozzo, the architect of his city palace, it was a stately structure, for after his return from his brief banishment Cosimo indulged his passion for architecture¹ and literature and founded at Careggi the Platonic Academy, installing Marsilio Ficino as its head. The Platonists held their meetings in its noble vaulted loggia. "I came to Careggi yesterday," Cosimo writes to Marsilio, "as much

¹ He built the church of San Lorenzo, the church and monastery of San Marco, the monasteries of Santa Verdiana and of San Gerolamo at Fiesole, besides many other abbeys and chapels, giving each monastery a library.

for the purpose of improving my land as of benefiting myself. Come to me as soon as you possibly can and do not forget to bring with you divine Plato's treatise on *The Sovereign Good*, you ought ere this to have translated it into Latin. There is no research to which I would more willingly devote myself than to that of truth. Come then and bring with you the Orphean lyre."

Marsilio later carried out his patron's suggestion, translating five volumes of Plato.

He kept a lamp burning before the bust of his adored philosopher, thus rendering him divine honours, and laying the foundations for the cult which was carried still farther during the lifetime of Lorenzo, by two younger men, Angelo Politian and Pico della Mirandola.

Lorenzo never ceased to love his grandfather's friend, and speaks of him as "Marsilio whom heaven has filled with its own especial grace."

Cosimo died at Careggi in 1464 surrounded by his family. The spot was dear to the youthful Lorenzo from old association, and he extended and beautified the villa. It was a castle in his grandfather's day, and Cosimo's machicolated battlements still protect the *chemin de ronde* where an hundred men at

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arms formerly defended the fortress with crossbows and boiling pitch. Lorenzo added the cinque-cento court and exquisite marble loggetta extending from his own suite of rooms in the second story, and filled the great hall with his art treasures commissioning Botticelli to paint for it his *Primavera*.

Moved possibly by a feeling kindred to his grandfather's that Careggi was the spot on earth nearest heaven, Lorenzo also retired to it when he knew that death was near. It was the scene of that memorable last interview with Savonarola, when the stern monk demanded the liberty of Florence as price of absolution, and the Magnificent silently turned his face to the wall and died unshriven.

But while Careggi is famous as the spot where both Cosimo and Lorenzo died, and in accordance with their wishes was kept up after their death as the home of the Platonic Academy, other villas are more intimately and joyously associated with the life of Lorenzo. Cafaggiuolo a moated grange, half castle and half farm, remote from Florence, on a spur of the Apennines in the Mugello, was chosen by Cosimo's son Piero for his family life. Hither he sent his wife, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, and his sons, Lorenzo and Giuliano, during the last

fierce struggle with the Albizzi for municipal supremacy. Here they lived an ideally simple and natural life, the mother, a high-minded woman whose noble face has been preserved for us by Botticelli, taught the boys to sing Christmas Carols or Lauds of her own composition giving them that taste for poetry which later in Lorenzo blossomed into more elaborate expression.

The youths though thus carefully sheltered must have been aware that exciting events were transpiring near at hand, for Lorenzo was nine years of age when his grandfather and father rode into Florence under an escort of armed peasants of Cafaggiuolo and controlled the election of the signory.

Lorenzo, like his grandfather, took an interest in agriculture and was popular with the countrymen, as well as with the citizens of Florence. He loved the savage wilderness where his boyhood was passed better than the formal gardens of his later palaces. Among other of his poems which attest this predilection is a sonnet accompanying a gift of violets beginning

Not from bright cultured gardens, where sweet airs
Steal softly round the roses' terraced home,

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VILLA OF POGGIO A CAJANO

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Into thy white hand, Lady, have we come;
Deep in dark dingles are our wild-wood lairs.

While the pest was raging in Florence he sent his family to Cafaggiuolo with Politian as tutor, and the letters of little Piero to his father give interesting pictures of the villa life of a patrician and of the occupations of his brothers and sisters.

"Giuliano," he writes, "thinks of nothing but laughter; Lucrezia sews, sings, and reads; Maddelena knocks her head against the wall; Luisa can already say a few things, and Contessina makes a great noise all over the house."

The boy, though but seven years, wrote his letters in Latin, and presumes upon his superiority to his brothers and sisters in point of diligence and scholarship to beg for favours. "To give a tone to my letters," he says, "I have always written them in Latin, and yet I have not had the little horse you promised me, so that everybody laughs at me."

In another letter he explains: "*Nondum venit equulus, magnifice pater,*" and again: "I am afraid something must have happened to the pony, because if it had been all right you would have sent it to me as you promised. In

case that one can not come please send me another."

At last the pony was sent and was shared by the other children, for Politian writes: "Giovanni" (the future Pope Leo X. then three years of age) "rides out on horseback, and the people follow him in crowds."

But in spite of country sports and the prattle of her children, Clarice Orsini, wife of Lorenzo, was not happy at Cafaggiuolo. The tutor also may have been rendered ill-tempered by the bad weather and loneliness, for they quarrelled continually, and Lorenzo finally established Politian in a villa at Fiesole. Gloomy Cafaggiuolo was destined to take a still darker tone from a family tragedy enacted later in its history, but for nearly a century the winds howled around its tenantless walls, while the family of the Magnificent disported themselves at Poggio a Caiano. This villa (beyond the Cascine to the west of Florence) was originally the castle of the Governor of Pistoia; but was purchased by Lorenzo and rebuilt for him by Sangallo in so palatial a guise that Charles V. declared it too regal a building for a private citizen. Its grand salon, which Vasari called "*la piu bella sala del mondo*," is adorned with frescoes whose classical subjects typify events in the



SATYRS, GARDEN OF THE VILLA OF POGGIO A CAJANO

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history of the Medicis. Cosimo's triumphant return after his banishment by Rinato degli Albizzi is celebrated in *Cicero's Entrance into Rome*, while Andrea del Sarto's *Cæsar Receiving Tribute from Egypt*, refers to an embassy sent from the Sultan to Lorenzo in 1487, and includes a portrait of the giraffe which was one of the sultan's gifts. This animal attained such a celebrity that it became the cause of diplomatic complications. Anne de Beaujeu when Regent had asked for it and had been refused and her brother Charles VIII. was disappointed on not finding it in his visit to Florence.

Poggio signifies "hill"; the word is frequently combined with some other in villa nomenclature. At Caiano the terraces step down in every direction and command superb views. A view of the main building without its adjuncts of colonnades, orangeries, and gardens gives an inadequate idea of its charm. Lorenzo entertained here lavishly, but the wonder tales of his hospitality are eclipsed in interest by later and more tragical associations. It is the story of Bianca Capello which is most often told the visitor, for

There at Cajano,
Where when the hawks were mewed and evening
came,

Pulci would set the table in a roar,
The fair Venetian died, she and her lord,
Died of a posset drugged by him who sate
And saw them suffer, flinging back the charge
The murderer on the murdered.

In the garden they will show you the very satyrs who leered beneath the vine-wreathed pergola while Bianca and the Grand Duke ate by mistake the confection of cherries poisoned, as some maintained by her own hand for her husband's brother and heir, and as others as confidently assert poisoned by him for his hated sister-in-law.

Cardinal Ferdinando certainly welcomed her death and that of his brother, for when their pangs seized them he placed his back against the gate and allowed no one to go in search of a physician or any one to enter the villa until all was over. As grand duke he refused her sepulchre in the family tomb, declaring "we will not have that adventuress among our dead."

Traditions in regard to Bianca cling to other Medicean villas particularly to Pratolino, beyond Fiesole, on the way to Bologna, noted for its giant statue of the Apennines, and to Castello. Here, as we were shown the grottos with their grotesque menagerie modelled and



STATUE OF THE "APENNINES"
In the park of the Villa Medici at Pratolino

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coloured so livingly that the wild beasts seem to have left their lairs to drink from the fountain basin, we could quite believe the unauthentic legend of Bianca's pet leopard and the part which it played in the disappearance of her first husband.

Castello was also the home of another woman of agitated life, Catherine Sforza, who, after many wild adventures, married Giovanni de' Medici and retired to this charming retreat with her son who was to be known later as Giovanni delle Bande Nere, the last of the gerat condottiere.

Castello is one of the smaller Medicean villas and lies, with its twin Petraia, a little beyond Careggi, near the village of Quarto. It boasts of a magnificent fountain (formerly it had two) by Tribolo with a statue of wrestlers by Giovanni da Bologna. The mate to this fountain now at Petraia is thus quaintly described by Vasari:

Il Tribolo carved on the marble base a mass of marine monsters, all plump and undercut, with tails so curiously twisted together that nothing better can be done in that style. Having finished it, he took a marble basin, brought to Castello long before. Near to the edge of the said basin he made a circle of dancing boys holding festoons; also the

stem to go above the said basin he executed with much grace, with masks for spouting water, and on the top of this stem a bronze female figure wringing the water out of her hair with her hands.

Castello is connected with Petraia by a beautiful walk through a grove of gnarled ilex trees whose statues suggested to Mary Robinson the graceful verses beginning:

The Triton in the ilex wood
Is lonely at Castello.

Petraia is a villa of many vicissitudes. Its ancient tower, contemporaneous possibly with that of the Palazzo Vecchio, is the only vestige of the early castle built and defended so valorously by the Brunelleschi in the fourteenth century. The main buildings were constructed by Buontalenti for the Grand Duke Ferdinando de' Medici (the same who watched the death-agonies of Bianca Capello).

It was his favourite residence after his sale of the Medici Palace in Florence to the Riccardis. Browning makes Ferdinando endeavour to tempt the young Riccardi couple to visit him at Petraia in furtherance of his intrigue with the bride:

What, if we break from the Arno bowers
And try if Petraja, cool and green,
Cure last night's fault with this morning's flowers?



FOUNTAIN OF VENUS

By Giovanni di Bologna, Villa Reale della Petraia



FOUNTAIN OF HERCULES

By Tribolo, Villa Reale di Castello



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Ferdinando's equestrian statue as Grand Duke stands in the square opposite the Riccardi Palace and suggested to Browning the poem of *The Statue and the Bust*.

Tourists crane their necks in search of the bust by Lucca della Robbia, not noting that Browning especially states that the majolica rilievo

Was set where now is the *empty* shrine,
And leaning out of a bright blue space
As a ghost might lean from a chink of sky
The passionate, pale lady's face.

Ferdinando could well afford to part with his ancestral palazzo, for his mother, Eleanora of Toledo, had purchased the Pitti Palace and the neighbouring hillside where Il Tribolo, Buontalenti, and Ammanati created the most grandiose of Tuscan pleasure grounds—the Boboli Gardens.

To connect his residence with the Uffizi (the offices) built for the civil courts, Ferdinando carried the corridor over the Ponte Vecchio.

The Medici villas in this generation were stage settings for tragedies. Poor Bianca Capello was not the only wife destined in Ferdinando's opinion to bring disgrace upon the family name. His younger brother Piero had married a Spanish lady, Eleonora di Gra-

zia, of suspected frailty. Her husband took her to Cafaggiuolo and stabbed her there, the deed creating no great sensation, for was she not his wife?

Still more heartless seems Duke Francesco's and Ferdinando's sanction of the murder of their own sister, Isabella de' Medici, the wife of Paolo Giordano Orsini, Duke of Bracciano.

The brothers incited Bracciano to revenge as the only proper course under the circumstances for "a Christian and a gentleman."

The supposedly injured husband visited his wife at their villa Poggio Imperiale¹ just outside the Porta Romana. He presented her with two beautiful greyhounds "for next morning's hunt," and was extremely affectionate and attentive in the presence of the household though it was remarked that the Duchess was distraught and sad as though oppressed by forebodings.

She was strangled that night (July 16, 1576) and privately buried "without scandal or inquisition."

The Duke of Bracciano immediately mar-

¹So named when reconstructed in 1622 for Maddalena of Austria wife of Cosimo II. The villa originally belonged to the Salviati family. It is now a school for the daughters of the Italian nobility; its grounds have been sold away, but the grand avenue of cypress and ilex by which it is still approached gives an idea of their original extent.

ried Vittoria Accoramboni, but he never brought her to Poggio Imperiale.

Duke Francesco de' Medici though he had authorised his sister's taking off could not forgive her husband for filling her place with a successor so far beneath her in rank. In doing so, however, Bracciano had but followed Francesco's own example in marrying Bianca Capello after the suspected murder of his first wife, Joanna of Austria.

The ghosts of these two unfortunate Medicen ladies are still supposed to haunt their villas. Rogers refers to the tragedies and the superstition in his *Italy*:

Sobs of grief,
 Sounds inarticulate, suddenly stopt
 And followed by a struggle and a gasp—
 A gasp in death—are heard yet in Carreti,
 Along the marble halls and staircases
 Nightly at twelve; and at the self-same hour,
 Long wailings echo through the emptiness
 Of that old den, far up among the hills,
 Frowning on him who comes from Pietra Mala
 In them alas! within five days and less
 Two unsuspecting victims, passing fair
 Welcomed with kisses, and slain cruelly,
 One with the knife, one with the fatal noose.

Careggi, Cafaggiuolo, Poggio a Caiano, Poggio Imperiale, Castello, Petraia, and Pratolino are the most famous of the Medi-

cean villas near Florence; but there are many others that have belonged for longer or shorter periods to members of the family, or their connections.

Notable among these for its frescoes by Botticelli now in the Louvre (on the escalier Daru, opposite the winged *Victory*) is the modest Villa Lemmi. Though we can not entirely agree with "Vernon Lee" when she regrets their removal,¹ we must thank her for the series of word-paintings in which she expresses the charm of this simple villa:

You followed for some twenty minutes the road towards Sesto Fiorentino, then you turned off towards the old Medicean villa of Careggi whose castle-like machicolations are just visible among the trees, and then you left the high-road suddenly for a little, rough short-cut, with white walls overtopped by the whitish olive branches on either side; in front of which rose, against a screen of dark cypress plumes, a little, old white house, with heavily grated windows and a belvedere tower, opened out into a delicate pillared loggia, whence the pigeons swooped in flocks into the adjacent fields.²

That was Villa Lemmi. But you passed the old doorway surmounted by the stone escutcheon of

¹ Violet Paget, who saw the frescoes in their original entourage. See *Cornhill Magazine*, August, 1882.

² The Villa Lemmi is at Chiusso Macerelli, between Florence and Fiesole. It was in the possession of the Tornabuonis until 1541.

Albizzi or Tornabuoni, I know not which, and knocked at a wooden door, which, being opened, a peasant woman led you into a kind of farm yard and thence into the cool cloistered court of the villa. . . .

Then you entered a small, low room where some kitchen maid, scraping at the wall with her knife, laid bare a patch of paint, a gold streaked lock of hair; till scraping well and ill she scraped into existence two unguessed frescoes and out of existence perhaps two forever lost ones.

With the same delightful appreciation she describes the frescoes as we see them to-day:

One shows four young women advancing in hesitating procession, tall, slender, with doubled-girdled puffing garments, green and mauve and white, and vague sky-grey eyes giving, perhaps, some effaced flower, dropping it with dainty supple-wristed hands into a folded cloth held by one dressed in the straight, stiff, foldless russet skirt of a Florentine matron.

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The second fresco represents a company of damsels seated in a circle in a laurel grove. On a raised throne in the middle sits a half-veiled lady. Towards her a nymph is leading a noble, charming figure in scholar's gown of blue and purple shot silk, his long hair combed neatly; a sweet and thoughtful face, thin and pale with high arched nose and pale eyes under much-curved fanciful brows; a something between the scholar, the saint, and the page in his demure, boyish elegance; a thing of courts as well as of the study.

These were the frescoes. One look at them, and look also out of the windows over the shimmering olives to the white houses and towers of Fiesole. . . . Even thus four hundred years ago Botticelli may have watched the sunset as he left his work in the little quiet farm-villa before sauntering across the fields to Careggi. The little old villa with its square tower opening into its pillared loggia looks just the same. It has lost its frescoes, but it has lost less than have those poor, hustled, jostled paintings, expatriated, exiled to that Louvre staircase; and though it be quite forgotten and neglected, henceforward the Villa Lemmi has lost less than have we in losing the sense that a painting is better in a farmhouse where it can be enjoyed than in the most superb gallery where it will be overlooked.

Take heart, sad enthusiast, the frescoes are not overlooked; and many an admirer, both artist and layman, lingers spell-bound by their wonderful characterisation, longing to know the history of the gentle pair so lovingly presented to us by the great artist. They are Lorenzo Tornabuoni and his bride, Giovanna Albizzi, whose marriage healed the feud between the Medici and the Albizzi families.

Del Lungo gives a graphic account of their wedding festivities in 1486 when the square of San Michele Berteldi was converted into a public ball-room, and the roofed-in court-yard of the Albizzi Palace could hardly accommo-

date the more distinguished guests, who spent the night in feasting and dancing.

Four years later the great head of their house, Lorenzo the Magnificent died, leaving to his son Piero, the impossible task of governing Florence. But it is good to read how loyally Lorenzo Tornabuoni fought the losing fight for his incompetent cousin to the very end.

When in April, 1497, Piero made an abortive attempt to surprise Florence lurking at Poggio Imperiale with four thousand soldiers but not daring to attack the city, Lorenzo Tornabuoni and four others were arrested as conspiring within the city to effect his restoration.

They were taken chained to the Bargello, "which," says a writer of the time, "was filled with howling demons and resembled a cavern of hell," and were decapitated with hardly a pretence of trial. Lorenzo's bearing was undaunted, though he was the last to suffer, as the youngest, for he was only twenty-nine.

The Albizzis, only so recently allied to the Medicis, did not desert the family; and when Julius II., angry with Florence for having espoused the side of the French determined to make Piero de' Medici his lieutenant in the city, Antonfrancesco degli Albizzi (the brother

of Giovanna), seized the gonfaloniere Soderini by the throat and forced him to resign.

This time the Medicean star was in the ascendant and when Piero triumphantly entered Florence he was met and welcomed by Antonfrancesco Albizzi, who rode beside him to the door of his palace.

Alfred Austin, in his tragedy *Savonarola*, chooses the young Lorenzo Tornabuoni as his hero, but to give scope to the love story with which he relieves the horror of the general scheme, he makes him die unmarried and a rejected lover. One resents this setting aside of the winsome Giovanna on the part of the laureate and also that Vernon Lee so sensitive to artistic injustice should have carelessly asserted that the "noble figure in the scholar's gown," in the Villa Lemmi fresco is Pico della Mirandola!

For none remembers now the good the ill
She did, the deeds he thought should last for aye.
So, in the little room my voice can fill
They shall not be forgotten till I die.

Lorenzo the Magnificent is credited with having said that he had three sons: "The eldest (Piero) a fool, the second (Giovanni) a rogue, and the third (Giuliano) a saint."

Piero, who succeeded his father, justified this unflattering estimate of his abilities, and Giovanni, who became Pope Leo X., of his character, while Giuliano like many another good man left no impress upon his age either for good or evil.

Giuliano, the brother of Lorenzo the Magnificent, left one son, Giulio, who became pope as Clement VII. and the best talent and executive ability of the Medicis were thus transferred to Rome. From the Chair of St. Peter Leo and Clement ruled the destinies of their family, during the first half of the sixteenth century, marrying Catherine de' Medici, granddaughter of Piero, to Henri II. of France, and keeping the degenerate descendants of the Magnificent at the helm of Florence until the assassination of Alessandro brought the collateral younger branch of the family into power in the person of Cosimo, first Grand Duke of Tuscany.

It was his wife, Eleanora of Toledo, who purchased the Pitti Palace from Luca Pitti, who had ruined himself in its erection, and here her sons, Francesco and Ferdinando, successively held their court. Marie de' Medici, daughter of Francesco, loved it so well that

when Queen of Henri IV. she imitated its architecture in her Palace of the Luxembourg¹ just as Francis I. and Catherine de' Medici introduced Italian styles and artists in the building of Fontainebleau and the Louvre.²

The Medici Villa at Rome perhaps the most beautiful, as it is the best known of all the villas of the family, is intimately associated with the early history of the two Medicean queens of France. Catherine de' Medici purchased it from the Cardinal of Monte Pulciano and passed a part of her youth here, as did Marie de' Medici, whose room, looking out over the city, is shown on the second story. Both of the young girls delighted in its beautiful garden, with the unrivalled view from the terrace, and must frequently have tripped through the ilex wood and up the sixty steps leading, when the villa belonged to Sallust, to the Temple of the Sun. But though the garden was centuries old even then the hedges of clipped box, in whose niches the statues gleam, could not have been such walls of malachite as now, nor the fountain basins so choked with lilies, or Scopas's statue of

¹ See *Romance of the Bourbon Chateaux*, pp. 106 and 448.

² See *Romance of the Renaissance Chateaux*.



VILLA MEDICI, ROME

2020

Apollo so rioted over with *Banksia* roses,
nor

Those fountains of strange weird sculpture
With lichens and moss so o'ergrown,
They are marble greening in moss wreaths,
Or moss wreaths whitening to stone.

Catherine could not have seen these statues and in Marie de' Medici's time they must have been as white and well kept as though they were in some modern museum, for it was her uncle, Cardinal Ferdinando (who figures so largely in these pages,) who commissioned Annibale Lippi to complete the villa and who adorned this façade with bas-reliefs and filled the garden with his collections. Here were Gian di Bologna's bronze *Mercury*, the *Niobe and her Children* now in the Pitti Palace, and some three hundred other statues, busts, and sarcophagi, but pre-eminent over all was the *Venus de' Medici*, exiled to Florence later by Pope Innocent XI. as unfit for pure eyes to look upon. As a patron of art Ferdinando was a fit successor to Lorenzo the Magnificent and to Leo X., but when he succeeded his brother Francesco as Grand Duke of Tuscany he removed the most valued of his treasures to Florence thus contributing a large

quota of the masterpieces with which his family enriched the city.

Already in 1680, when Velasquez studied at Rome, the villa had entered upon its period of decline. Proof of this is shown in the interesting study which he made that year in its garden, and which now hangs in the Museum of Madrid. After many vicissitudes the villa was acquired in 1893 by the French Academy which has proved itself a faithful custodian. No happier fate or one more influential could have befallen it than to become the Roman residence of the most eminent of French artists and architects, nor could a better choice have been made for its owners. As Mrs. Wharton justly writes: "No one enters the grounds of the Villa Medici without being soothed and charmed by that garden magic which is the peculiar quality of some of the old Italian pleasantries. It is not necessary to be a student of garden-architecture to feel the spell of quiet and serenity which falls on one at the very gateway."¹

¹The author hopes in another volume—*Romance of the Villas of the Great Cardinals of the Renaissance*—to give more adequate presentation to the history of the Medicean villas in the neighbourhood of the Eternal City; and especially to the work of Raphael in the exquisite Villa Madama built for Pope Clement VII.

Study in the Garden of the Villa Medici at
Rome

Made by Velasquez in 1630. Original in Madrid. By permission
of Berlin Photographic Co., New York



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Even as popes the Medicis never transferred their affection from Florence, and returned to it as to their home, preferring it to Rome for their tombs.

The new sacristy of San Lorenzo intended as a mausoleum for the elder branch of the family was built by Michael Angelo for Pope Clement VII. It was to have contained the statues of Lorenzo the Magnificent, of Popes Leo X. and Clement VII., and also of the younger Giuliano (son of the Magnificent) created Duc de Nemours by the King of France, who died in 1516, and of Lorenzo de' Medici (grandson of the Magnificent) who was Duke of Urbino under Leo X.

Michael Angelo completed only the statues of the two last named, leaving the work unfinished on the death of his patron. He had no heart to blazon the glories of the family of the tyrant Alessandro who at that time trod upon the liberties of Florence.

Giuliano de' Medici is represented as General of the Church holding the Commander's baton. Below is the sarcophagus with the statues of *Day* and *Night* of which Battista Strozzi wrote:

*La Notte, che tu vedi in sì dolci
atti
Dormir, fu da un Angelo
sculpita
In questo sasso, e perchè
dorme ha vita;
Destala, se no'l credi, e par-
leratti.*

Michael Angelo answered:
*Grato m'è'l sonno e più l'esser
di sasso;
Mentre che'l danno e la ver-
gogna dura
Non veder, non sentir m'è
gran ventura;
Però non mi destar; deh!
parla basso!*

'T is Night, in deepest slumber;
all can see
She sleeps (for Angelo divine
did give
This stone a soul), and, since
she sleeps, must live;
You doubt it? Wake her, she
will speak to thee.

Ah! glad am I to sleep in
stone, while woe
And dire disgrace rage unre-
proved near—
A happy chance to neither see
nor hear.
So wake me not! When pass-
ing, whisper low.

Lorenzo is represented sunk in meditation. Statues of *Evening* and *Dawn* adorn his sarcophagus.

Michael Angelo's noble mausoleum must not be confounded with the Chapel of the Princes in San Lorenzo, built by the Grand Duke (and ex-cardinal) Ferdinando as a sepulchre for the cadet branch of the family, where all that wealth could do was done to perpetuate the memory of the almost royal Grand Dukes who reigned over Florence in the latter part of the sixteenth and nearly through the seventeenth century.

William Wetmore Story gives a graphic description of the examination of this vain-glorious sepulchre in 1857:

A rumour was current that they had been violated. The forty-nine coffins were taken down and a sad

state of things exposed. Some had been robbed. Some were the hiding places of rats, and such was the nauseous odour they gave forth that at least one of the persons employed in taking them down lost his life. But where they had not been stolen, the splendid dresses covered with jewels, the helmets and swords encrusted with gems and gold still survived the dust and bones that had worn them in their splendid pageants.

Dark and parchment-dried faces were seen, with their golden hair, rich as ever, and twisted with gems and pearls and golden nets. The cardinals still wore their mitres and red cloaks and splendid rings. On the breast of Cardinal Carlos (son of Ferdinando I.) was a beautiful cross of white enamel with the effigy of Christ in black surrounded with emeralds, and on his hand a rich sapphire ring. On that of Cardinal Leopold, the son of Cosimo II., over the purple *pianeta*, was a cross of amethysts and on his finger a jacinth. The dried bones of Vittoria della Rovere Montefeltro were draped in silk and lace of beautiful texture with her portrait as she was in life lying at her side. Cosimo I. and Cosimo II. had been stripped by profane hands of all their jewels and insignia, and so had Eleanora Toledo and others to the number of twenty. The dried bones of Giovanni delle Bande Nere were also here, his battles all over, his bones scattered and loose within his iron armour, and his rusted helmet with its visor down.

The two bodies which were found in best preservation were those of the Grand Duchess Giovanna d' Austria and her daughter Anna. Corruption had scarcely touched them and there they lay as if they had just died, the mother in red satin trimmed with

lace, her red silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, the ear-rings hanging from her ears and her blond hair, fresh as ever. And so after centuries had passed the truth became evident of the rumour that ran through Florence at the time of their death that they had died of poison. The arsenic which had taken their lives had preserved their bodies in death.

And this is what was left of the great Medici!

This indeed is but the common fate of humanity, of the good and the wicked alike, but for once Shakespeare was wrong when he wrote:

The evil that men do lives after them

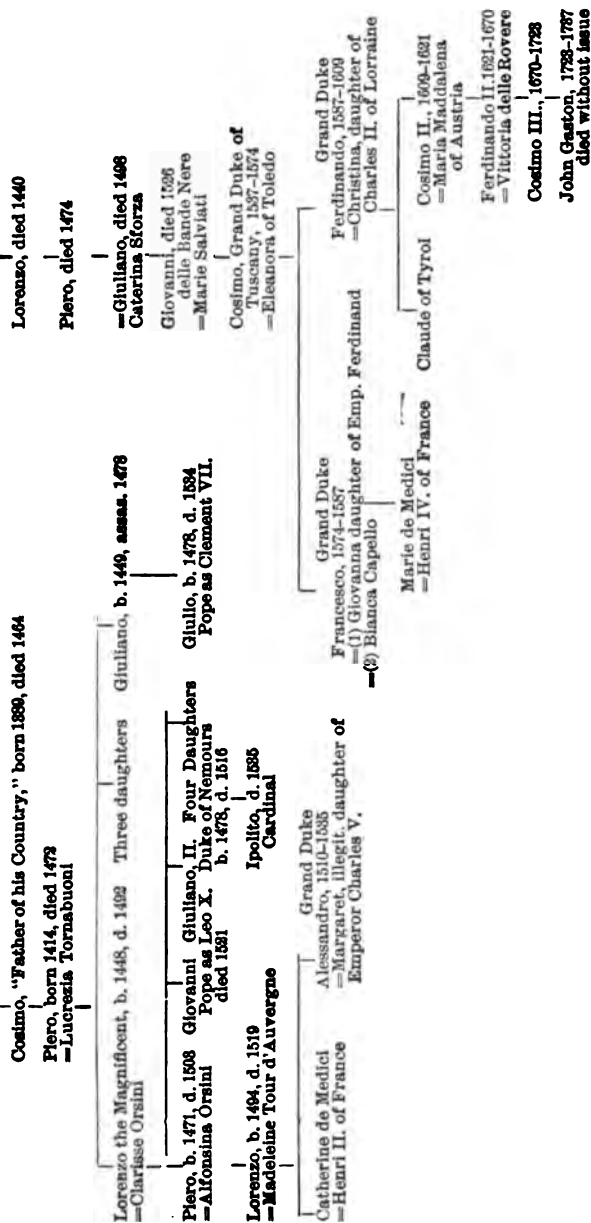
The good is often interred with their bones.

All the selfishness and vanity, the greed of power and lust and revenge of their private lives has vanished utterly; but their love and patronage of art, their munificent gifts to their native city live on and will continue to exert their influence.

Even a running sketch of the country-houses, castles, and palaces of Florence, as they now are [says Lee Bacon], is so interwoven with the life, and rise and fall of the Medici, that the summing up from Dumas's history of that family is as well given in his concise way, as in a more lengthy description. Dumas offers as an apology for the history of the Medici, if indeed, as he remarks, "any apology be necessary," that all must

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE MEDICI FAMILY

GIOVANNI, BORN 1360, DIED 1428



admit that art rose and fell with this family, and was subject to all the variations of their fortunes. With the steadily ascending power of Cosimo, "Father of his Country," art rose in the persons and works of Cimabue, Giotto, and Masaccio; with Lorenzo the Magnificent came a pause while it acquired new vigour; Leonardo da Vinci, Bartolommeo, Michael Angelo, Titian, Raphael, and Andrea del Sarto were born; with Leo X. all that had been promised by such a galaxy was fulfilled, all that blossomed became fruit. Under Cosimo I., not to be confounded with Cosimo, "Pater Patriæ," this family and art with it reached the acme, the apogee of their glory. Then both together, unable to become greater, began to decline; the Medici in the persons of Ferdinando I., Cosimo II., and Ferdinando II., art in the works of Vasari, Barroccio, Allori, John of San Giovanni, and Matthew Roselli. At last they fell together. The Medici now sleep peacefully in their tombs of marble and porphyry, having done more for the glory of this earth than any before them, or than princes, kings, and emperors have since done.



VILLA REALE DELLA PETRAIA

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CHAPTER V

ILARIA: A LEGEND OF TWO VILLAS

I

PETRAIA

TRAVELLING in Tuscany in the year of grace 1401, though not so audacious a tempting of Providence as in our own day of motor-cars, was still a plunge into the unknown resulting often in a chapter of accidents, and young Jacopo della Quercia, toward the close of the second day of his journey from Siena, congratulated himself that the long ride was nearly at an end. His mount was a good one, and he might easily have covered the distance in a single day had he chosen the most direct route; but as he carried a letter of introduction to the owner of a villa to the north of the city, he had made a long detour in order to present himself to his correspondent before entering Florence.

For the nonce there was nominal truce between the different powers which made this part of Italy a checker-board for their game of war; and there should have been no dangers to encounter other than those occasioned by the spring floods; but the country swarmed with soldiers of fortune, whose proper employment of legitimate fighting being now cut off, indulged on their own account in desultory forays upon inoffensive travellers. Della Quercia had quitted the village of Sesto before meeting with anything which could be called an adventure, when in the wildest and loneliest part of the road he suddenly came upon an overturned travelling-carriage. The horses were struggling on the brink of a ravine, utterly disregarded by their master, and his servants, who were engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with a half-dozen brigands.

A glance showed the new-comer that the travellers were gaining the day. The master, an elderly but still powerful man, was swinging his broadsword in great circles with shouts of fierce joy in the exercise, and his coachman and two outriders had each engaged a bandit with a courage which had surprised and daunted the assailants. In the meantime, however, a lady, the only remaining occupant of

the carriage, had been quite forgotten. She was endeavouring to climb through the doorway but the plunges of the horses rendered this impossible and in another moment they would have dragged the coach down the ravine had not della Quercia, springing from his horse, managed to cut the harness in the nick of time. His next act was to extricate the lady from the coach, and scarcely was this accomplished when she fainted. The young man brought water in his hat from a neighbouring brook, but paused in the act of dashing it in her face arrested by her loveliness.

Though he had held her in his arms and felt her face against his neck, he had not looked at her until now. It was not her beauty alone which enthralled him but this beauty rendered supernatural by the abnormal state in which he saw her.

The perfect hands lay passive at her side, the long lashes rested without a flicker upon the colourless cheeks. No flutter of breath quivered within the sensitive nostrils or moved her gentle breast, and yet there was nothing in the expression of her face to suggest the dull torpor or voluptuous languor or sleep, nor in her attitude aught of the cold rigidity of a statue or the ghastliness of death.

Life was here, but life held in suspense as by some enchantment. Even so must the Princess of the Bois Dormant have looked to the Prince whose happy destiny it was to waken her with a kiss. And yet della Quercia could never have so presumed, for a great peace had fallen upon her with such a heavenly benediction that it seemed sacrilege to disturb its sanctity. All his life long he held that vision in his memory, though it lasted but for a moment, for his ear caught the sound of stealthy steps approaching from behind just in time to save himself by a quick turn from the thrust of a stiletto, and to realise that three of the party of bandits were attacking from the rear. Two evil-looking fellows were engaged in removing the baggage from the coach, while a third, whose helmet with barred visor, Milanese armour, and rich clothing would in other circumstances have ranked him as a knight, had fallen upon the young sculptor. Fortunately his profession, necessitating the lifting of heavy blocks of marble and the exercise of the mallet, had rendered him athletic, and he had been adroit enough to wrest from his antagonist's hand and send flying to a distance the dagger so treacherously aimed at his back.

Fortunately, too, the water which had fallen upon the lady's face had restored her to consciousness and she sat up and shrieked.

Her husband, and his retainers, who had worsted their assailants, came running to the rescue, and the three brigands betook themselves to flight, disappearing in a grove of chestnuts, where sumpter mules and horses could be seen tethered in vain expectation of booty.

Without attempting to follow the robbers or waiting for explanations, della Quercia lent his assistance in dragging the less injured horse from the ravine in which it was floundering, and offered the stranger his own to supply the place of the one which it had been found necessary to despatch to put it out of agony.

"I accept this kindness," said the gentleman, "on condition that you share our carriage, for indeed without this interchange of courtesy I see not how either of us is to arrive to-night at his destination. I am Paolo Guinigi, Lord of Lucca. This lady is my wife, Ilaria, Marchesa del Carretto, and, as I am travelling on a matter of diplomatic importance requiring haste, your assistance is most providential."

"My concerns are of no great urgency," Jacopo answered, "for I am only a poor sculptor journeying to Florence to take part in the great competition for the doors of the Baptistery, of which your Excellency has doubtless heard."

"Never a word," replied Guinigi, "my time has been so occupied in hewing my own way with my sword that I have had no opportunity to interest myself in other carving."

But though ignorant of art the Lord of Lucca flattered himself that he was a good judge of men, and the bravery and ability with which this young man had so promptly assisted him awakened both his gratitude and his admiration.

The dagger which Jacopo had averted had been picked up and Guinigi begged the sculptor to retain it as a souvenir of his exploits. The Signora also expressed her thanks most graciously, and showed so much interest in the competition that della Quercia dilated upon it with enthusiasm. He explained that it was by far the greatest opportunity for distinction which had ever been offered to Italian genius, and that every sculptor in Tuscany who felt within himself the aspirations of ambition would doubtless inscribe himself as a competi-

tor. In the course of his naive recital the lady also learned that the contestants were to labour for a year at Florence upon a model for one panel of the gates and that della Quercia had brought with him a sufficient sum to maintain him for that time, but that it was all he possessed.

"Then after the result is announced," said Guinigi, "you must pay me a visit at Lucca, when I may be able to give you employment on a villa which I am constructing." "You are most kind," della Quercia replied gratefully, "but immediately after the award is made I shall be obliged to begin work upon the gates. It will take me several years to complete them, and I would not keep your Excellency waiting so long for the ornamentation of your villa."

Guinigi looked at the enthusiast admiringly. "And you have made no provision in your plans for failure?"

Jacopo laughed and blushed. "I shall not fail," he replied, and this quiet confidence in his own powers combined with the charm of his personality prepossessed his hearers still further in his favour.

"I regret," said Guinigi, as the equipage halted before the drawbridge of a fortified

villa, "that I cannot conduct you into Florence. I will be as frank with you as you have been with me, and confess that though our cities are now at peace it might be dangerous for the Lord of Lucca to place himself in the power of the Florentine signory, and I beg you will not mention my name in the city though I shall make but a brief visit at this Castle of Petraia."

"Petraia," exclaimed della Quercia, "is it possible that this is the villa of the architect Brunelleschi, to whom I am recommended?"

"I know naught of architects," replied Guinigi. "Of two things only am I certain that it is called Petraia and is the stronghold of my old friend, Sir John Hawkwood, the English condottiere so famous in the late wars."

"It is possible," suggested the Signora, "that this Brunelleschi may be one of Sir John's retainers or that our host can inform you where your friend can be found."

This hope, with an odour of roast meats which greeted his hungry nostrils, persuaded della Quercia to remain quietly in the coach as it rattled over the bridge and into the stone-paved court of the fortified villa.

Petraia at this time merited its name, a

cairn, or heap of stones. Only its fine mediæval tower subsists of the castle that della Quercia entered that evening, which was then one of the strongest in the neighbourhood of Florence.

The arrival of the Guinigis had been expected, and their host and hostess stood at the entrance of the great hall.

Della Quercia stared with keen interest at the doughty English knight, who had fought so gloriously for the Black Prince in France, and, after the Peace of Bretigny, had as ingloriously placed his famous White Company at the command of the highest bidder during the party wars which devastated Italy. Now it was Pisa, now the Pope who had subsidised his services; Gian Galeazzo Visconti, had been glad to secure them by giving him in marriage his own cousin, Donnana, and della Quercia was presently to hear how it had happened that this turncoat veteran was now in the pay of Florence as her Captain-General.

Sir John Hawkwood greeted his guests, the young sculptor included, with hearty hospitality and would listen to no explanations regarding the latter's ultimate destination until after a bountiful supper. It was enough for him that the stranger had come valorously to

the aid of his friends, in an encounter whose recital roused all the fighting blood of the old warrior.

"Brigands and highwaymen!" he cried, "this touches me as guardian of the public peace. So near to my own castle, too, where one might think such gentry would be held in awe by my men-at-arms. Can you give any description of the rogues which would assist in their identification?"

"I have a shrewd guess," replied Guinigi, "that you might have recognised them had you been with us, for one fellow with whom I dealt wore a Milanese shirt of mail, capped by a well-dinted old English helmet, another wielded his French sword as though it were an English battle-axe and a third, toggled out in new Florentine armour, let forth a good, sound English oath when I pricked him. You can judge for yourself whether such varied accoutrements and accomplishments are to be found outside of your own White Company."

"Is it so?" laughed Sir John, "well, the lads have much excuse, no employment and no pay has driven many an honest man to the road. To-day, however, I thought them out of temptation, for I put them under the orders of my wife's cousin, who was minded, the rash

fellow, while waiting your arrival, to amuse himself by a wolf hunt in the mountains. He could not bring his own escort so near to Florence without exciting suspicions; they await him in the Mugello, and I confess that even so I am anxious for his safety and yours, and shall be glad when your business is concluded and you are both once more on your own territory. Ah! here he comes, tricked out in his gayest doublet, in your honour, Signora. Too fine, my gallant, for the rôle of one of my Tuscan neighbours which you play while visiting me. Was your hunt successful? Cut short your compliments and to table for the roast is cold."

The new-comer greeted the Guinigis with effusion, but treated della Quercia to a supercilious and suspicious scrutiny, which the latter repaid with interest. He had never before to his knowledge seen Filippo Maria Visconti, son of the magnificent Gian Galeazzo, then Duke of Milan, and yet there was something strangely familiar in his figure and stride and the arrogant toss of his head.

"'T is a friend of our friends," Hawkwood explained to his relative, "Your pardon, Sir Sculptor, but I believe you said that you were also a friend of the architect Brunelleschi, who

is in a way my unwilling landlord. The matter stands thus with us: His father and uncle held this their castle of Petraia almost single handed when I led the Pisan troops against Florence and sacked every other villa of importance in this vicinity. Again and again I strove to draw them into the open by tricking flight, but the brothers were too crafty for me. Their cellars were full of good oil from the olive groves on the slopes. They heated it to boiling and anointed our heads therewith when we attempted to force in the gate. Faith, I have tried many a hair-curling in my day but I liked that least of all and five of us have been bald as tonsured monks ever since. They kept us at the siege for two months, all Florence never daring to make a sally in their assistance. We might have been encamped outside the gates at this hour, instead of seated where they sat, had the pantries been as full of good victual then as they are now. So at last we starved them until they surrendered; but even then they stipulated that they should retain the tower. I was lucky enough to have the rest, for the signory of Florence learning that I was master of Petraia gave me a hundred and thirty thousand gold florins in return for my pledge never again

to bear arms against the republic, and finally Maso Albizzi himself visited me here, and offered me a pension of twelve thousand florins per year as Captain-General of the city. So I told him that if he would secure me the title deeds of this villa I would accept. Think you that those two Brunelleschis would sell? Not at all. Though poor they swore that what my sword had not obtained that should not my purse have either. But it was only another case of starvation, and they consented at last to lease the villa to the city, and so to me, provided always that they were allowed to remain in their precious tower.

“They are dead now, the two good fighters, God rest their souls. One son of the house remains, the mad architect whom you seek,—madman I call him, in that he has no taste for the profession of arms. He has filled the tower with models of buildings and strange engines which he has left in the care of an apprentice, for he is here but seldom.”

While Hawkwood had been giving della Quercia this account of the Brunelleschis, Filippo Maria Visconti had addressed himself to the Guinigi and more particularly in compliment to the Signora, with whom he was manifestly greatly taken. Della Quercia

thought that the lady was not pleased by his attentions but suffered them rather than offend a personage whose friendship was necessary to her husband. Guinigi endeavoured from time to time to gain a hearing for the business for which this rendezvous had been arranged; but it was not until the lady, pleading fatigue, retired from the hall that Visconti gave the slightest attention to the maps and papers which the Lord of Lucca had spread upon the table.

Della Quercia would also have excused himself, thinking that it was possibly his presence which made Visconti averse to discussing the matter in hand; but his host laid a detaining hand upon his arm. "Bide with me lad. Yonder two reck not of our presence. We are too far away in this ingle-nook to hear or to be heard by them. It is not often that I have a guest who is so willing a listener as yourself. I am growing old and love to relive my campaigns in recounting them. I have seen much and done not a little that would make a pretty story were it well written. I had a friend once, a young clerk named John Froissart who often said so. He had a trick of writing and loved to listen to my adventures. Where he may be now I know not. We were together last

in Milan at the marriage of that young man's aunt, Violante Visconti to Lionel of Clarence, son of our beloved King, Edward of England. Ah! that was a wedding! The cathedral was not great enough to contain the company so it was celebrated on the steps without the doors, and the public square was packed with the guests. The banquet was most sumptuous, served upon gold plate, and Gian Galeazzo, brother of the bride, distributed gifts between every course; jewels and other trinkets for the ladies, for the men arms, purses of gold, and even horses. This ivory hilted dagger fell to my share. It is the mate of one which Gian Galeazzo had made for himself, with the date of the wedding damascened upon the blade, and which he gave later to his son, my present guest. We compared them but yesterday; my cousin will show his to you if you are curious in such matters."

So the old man garrulously maundered on, but della Quercia listened no further, for his brain was stunned by a strange discovery. The dagger which Sir John showed him was the exact counterpart of the one which he had wrested from the mysterious robber knight, and which was now in his own belt. He could have proved to Sir John that his relative had

been the leader of the attack upon the Guinigis, but doubt as to whether such action on his part would be politic held his lips sealed.

To warn the Lord of Lucca against this treacherous ally seemed the wiser course; but the young man could think of no means to gain his ear, for Visconti and he were now deep in the discussion of some future campaign, in which Lucca and Milan were to join hands against Florence.

Meantime Sir John's volubility had babbled itself out, and he dozed in the chimney corner until the great bell of the villa clanged midnight, and he sprang to his feet declaring that it was time all good Christians were in bed. Della Quercia could but follow his host, but Guinigi bade them good-night, saying that he and Visconti had still matter for discussion. The sculptor gave the young Milanese nobleman another searching look as he left the hall and saw that his dagger sheath which depended from his girdle was empty. Hawkwood still held the stiletto which he had just shown, and before replacing it in the rack above the fireplace called upon Visconti to compare his own with it.

An expression of malignant comprehension crossed the face of the young noble but was

instantly controlled. "One does not go armed in the house of one's friend," he said, "I have left my dagger in my chamber but will show it to this young man in the morning."

Della Quercia followed his host up a spiral staircase to the turret which had been prepared for him, striving in vain to solve the puzzle why Filippo Maria Visconti, envoy of his father, the magnificent Gian Galeazzo, sent to the castle of his relative to treat with the Lord of Lucca should have fallen like an ordinary highwayman upon his friend and ally. The riddle passed his wit until Sir John himself suggested the clue:

"Why did you stare at my relative yonder as though you were fascinated?" he asked. "The young man is not so handsome or so cruel as his father though he is quite as unscrupulous and far more crafty in carrying out his schemes. I would advise our friend Guinigi to look well or he will be outwitted. They have met before and my wife tells me that Filippo Maria is enamoured of Guinigi's beautiful wife. I suspect that he has besought Donnana to arrange that she should come with her husband to this conference and that my wife, who is a plotter like all women, has managed in some way to effect it. I like

not these women's schemes, they have ruined many a good man. I stabbed a nun with little scruple once because two of my captains were fighting for her at the sack of a convent. 'There,' said I, 'you have now nothing to quarrel over, and I am not going to lose one or both of my bravest men for such trash as that.' I shall warn Guinigi that if he goes into battle with Filippo Maria to keep the Milanese soldiers well in the lead, or my Lord of Lucca will stand in danger of dying from a wound in the back."

"In truth I wish you would give him that warning," said della Quercia, and again his hand was upon the hilt of the dagger and the story of how he had come by it trembled upon his lips. But at that instant he stood at his open casement and across the court silhouetted against a lighted curtain he saw a profile whose pure Greek outline was carved upon his memory with the sharpness of a cameo. It was the Lady Ilaria Guinigi waiting for her lord who presently crossed the court and joined her. Here was an opportunity to inform them of his discoveries, and della Quercia hastily descended the turret staircase. But to gain the court it was necessary for him to cross the great hall and as he precipitately en-

tered that room he discovered too late that he had interrupted an interview between Filippo Maria Visconti and his cousin, Donnana Hawkwood. They were seated in the chimney-corner and did not immediately observe him. The young nobleman had just related his foiled attempt to carry off the Marchesa and his cousin was laughing heartily.

"I shall succeed better on their homeward journey," Visconti declared. "They do not leave until noon in order that the Marchesa may have opportunity to rest. I shall take my leave of your husband before they are stirring, join my Milanese escort, disguise them as bandits, and fall upon the Guinigi toward evening. It is as well that the abduction is postponed for I have now transacted my father's business. Guinigi does not suspect me. He will imagine that his wife has been stolen by ordinary brigands, and I will have her safe in one of my castles near Milan to-morrow night."

As he spoke della Quercia drew back but unfortunately overturned a stool, and Visconti snatching his host's dagger from the rack sprang at the intruder. Della Quercia parried his attacks while Donnana shrieked for help. Servants rushed in and separated

the combatants and Sir John roused from slumber and appearing only half clad demanded the meaning of the uproar.

Visconti at once gave a plausible version. He had retired to his room, which adjoined the hall, but on hearing a slight noise had seized his stiletto, and returning had found della Quercia in the act of stealing his host's arms. The Milanese dagger in the young sculptor's hand seemed to confirm this statement. Sir John Hawkwood snatched it from him overwhelming the abashed young man with reproaches for thus violating his hospitality, nor would he listen to della Quercia's explanation of how it came into his possession.

"Take him," Hawkwood cried to his men, "and lock him in one of the dungeons, and to-morrow I will have him branded as a thief."

"First at least," cried the unhappy young man, "inquire of the Lord of Lucca whether I speak the truth."

But Visconti drowned this request, and the perfidious Donnana asserted that she too, having chanced to enter the hall to be sure that the fire was covered, had seen della Quercia take the dagger from the rack.

Roughly thrust into a noisome cell, with

prospect of pain and shame upon the morrow, the young man's concern was still not for himself. The anxiety which tortured him unceasingly was for his newly made friends, and especially for the beautiful and innocent lady whom he was so powerless to aid.

For several hours della Quercia lay in darkness, but with dawn there was a flicker of light high up on the wall of his dungeon. It came from an aperture too high for him to reach, but it showed him to his surprise and delight that though his guards had turned the key in the door of his cell they had done so carelessly, neglecting to first entirely close the door, so that the great bolts had not slipped into their sockets, and as he was not chained he easily pushed the door open and stepped into a long, narrow passage. One end was closed by the door which led to the stairway down which he had come and this was securely fastened, but the passage led on apparently into the bowels of the earth, and was dimly lighted by a grated opening in the ceiling which was doubtless the pavement of the court. As della Quercia pursued his exploration he found his progress barred by a gate fastened on the hither side. Nothing was visible in the obscurity beyond, but familiar sounds

came at regular intervals, which made his heart thump responsively against his ribs. They were the blows of a mallet upon a chisel and the light click of falling fragments of marble. Somewhere beyond that iron grille a sculptor was at work, and the young man shook the gate and shouted with all his might. Presently a door opened and the full light of sunrise shone dazzlingly in, outlining the figure of a boy, who still held a stone-carver's mallet. Della Quercia comprehended that he had arrived at the lowest story of Brunelleschi's tower, and as the tower rose from the hillside on a lower level than the rest of the villa this story was not underground but was the main entrance giving directly upon the open country. He hailed the youth and asked him if he were the apprentice and care-taker of whom Hawkwood had spoken.

"I am indeed a pupil of the great Brunelleschi, Donatello by name," replied the boy, "but you approach my patron's dwelling in so strange a fashion that I must know more of you before giving you admittance."

Della Quercia told his story but Donatello shook his head doubtfully. "How do I know but Sir John is right and you are justly imprisoned. I would not admit a thief into

my master's home. More especially as it is his atelier and he is engaged upon the very competition, for which you say you have come to Florence. I have no fear but he will easily surpass all contestants but you might filch his ideas and I am minded to let you rest where you are."

"Do me one favour, I beseech you," della Quercia begged, "give me the means of writing a letter and take it for me to Paolo Guinigi, Lord of Lucca, at present a guest of Sir John Hawkwood. Then let what must happen to me. I shall at least have warned him of his peril."

"That does not seem so unreasonable," Donatello replied thoughtfully, at once complying with the request. He returned presently and unlocked the grille. "The lady bade me set you free and give you this note," he said, and della Quercia read: "My husband and I thank you. We have decided to set out at once and by another route than that which we announced for Lucca. We leave a letter for Sir John saying that news just received demands our instant return and we judged it best not to disturb his rest or that of his other guest by our early departure. In another and private note we tell him how you

came by the dagger, but it may be as well for you not to wait for that exculpation, but to put yourself out of the power of our untrustworthy ally by proceeding at once to Florence.

"That you may find there all the success you hope, and which you so richly deserve is the prayer of

"Your grateful

"ILARIA DEL CARRETTO."

As della Quercia left Petraia he could see the carriage and escort of the Guinigis (which the Lord and Lady of Lucca had silently joined at the stables without rousing the villa) moving swiftly westward, and the young sculptor laughed aloud as he thought how Visconti and his men would wait for them in vain at the mountain pass when they would be safely entering their own walled city.

But his laugh died away, and though he strode doggedly on toward Florence there was an ache at his heart as the conviction grew upon him that in all probability he would never again look upon the gentle lady whom fate had thrown so strangely in his way.

In this foreboding della Quercia was altogether at fault, for love and hate alike overleap all probabilities and the young sculptor

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had not seen his last either of Maria Filippo Visconti or of Ilaria del Carretto.

II

THE RESULT OF THE COMPETITION, AND A COMEDY OF ERRORS AT COLLODI

The Florence which della Quercia entered in that first year of the quattrocento, was very different from the one we know.

Not only had Michael Angelo and Leonardo and the other great sculptors, painters, and architects, the suns of the Renaissance not yet arisen, but Florence for a hundred years would know nothing of the Medici who set that galaxy in her firmament. Neither Fra Angelico nor Botticelli, nor Ghirlandajo had yet touched brush to colour, nor Desiderio, nor Mino of Fiesole made marble breathe. The cathedral had been building for many a year but it was not yet the Duomo for the great walls were roofless, and no architect had solved the problem of spanning the mighty void. The signory were debating many schemes, one being to fill the church temporarily with earth as a support while rafters were being rivetted, and it was suggested that gold pieces should be

mingled with the earth in order that the populace might be induced to remove it without other remuneration. Brunnelleschi had submitted a proposal for roofing with a dome but had not condescended to explain how he intended to effect this result, and the city fathers looked upon his plan as that of a visionary.

But della Quercia saw the Palazzo Vecchio as we see it now, its slender tower, the twin of the Mangia in his own Siena, shooting like a lily-stalk from the battlemented bulk. Many another lesser tower rose from the plain, cubical palazzos of the nobility, built, not for beauty but for warfare, of courses of huge stones roughly facettèd *en bossage*, with slits for the archers in lieu of windows on the story opening directly on the street, between which were iron *torchères* from whose great rings chains were stretched across the way to close the passage when the factions were out. Higher up in the wall was a loggia whose sharply pointed arches bristled like rows of stacked lances, and over all a beetling parapet replaced later by the mighty cornice which still subsists and gives to the older palaces the stern, uncompromising character which makes them "perhaps the grandest buildings ever inhabited by private citizens."

But there was already a stir as of spring-time in the air, a feeling for beauty demanding expression and achieving it. Giotto had passed that way, and his campanile, the tower of peace, overtopped the Vecchio's tower of bloodshed; and now the competition for the doors of the Baptistery had drawn together a coterie of artists who were to be the precursors of the Renaissance.

Della Quercia's confidence did not desert him through the weary months which followed. There was only one name upon the roll of competitors which gave him uneasiness, that of Filippo Brunnelleschi. Every one with whom the young sculptor conversed agreed that this Brunnelleschi was an unappreciated genius bound to achieve great things and who would by no means let slip this opportunity of proving his pre-eminence. But della Quercia had seen something of his work and believed that he could better it. Of the other contestants he had met but one—a young man named Lorenzo Ghiberti, apprenticed to his goldsmith stepfather. Della Quercia had entered their shop attracted by the artistic quality of the work displayed and had found him engaged in the intervals of trade in painting some small panels.

"You are a painter as well as a metal worker?" the sculptor asked in surprise.

"My stepson," replied the old goldsmith, "is variously talented, as indeed every artist must be. He has but just returned from Rimini where he has been engaged in making decorations for Pandolfo Malatesta."

"You smiths are lucky," said della Quercia, "for you are never at a loss for patrons. The great employ you all their lives upon their luxuries while we sculptors come in only for their tombs after they are dead."

"And which of our Florentine nobles is so fortunate as to have secured you to carve his sarcophagus?" asked Ghiberti.

Della Quercia blushed and was obliged to confess that at present he had not even a tomb in way of a definite commission, and that he had been attracted to Florence solely by the competition.

"Then we are in like case," laughed the other, "for it happens very oddly that I resigned my post at Rimini and returned to Florence at my stepfather's urging for the same purpose."

"You," exclaimed della Quercia in surprise, "you who have just acknowledged that you

are by predilection a painter devoted to pictorial art!"

"And why not?" asked Ghiberti. The panels afforded by those bronze doors appeal to me as so many canvasses for pictures in relief. If I win I will show you that the study of drawing and perspective is not a bad preparation for the art of sculpture."

"I look at my art in a bigger way," replied the other. "Give me a tub of clay and let me plunge my arms therein, and I will model you real men and women, not flat pictures. Believe me, my friend, you are wasting your time in entering this competition. Stick to your painting in which I perceive you have a considerable talent and doubt not you will one day reap rich laurels."

Della Quercia had occasion later to remember with mortification these vainglorious words, for the prize was finally awarded not to himself or to his dreaded rival, Brunelleschi, but to the young goldsmith, Ghiberti.

Brunelleschi in his disappointment determined to quit for ever his native city, and, selling his ancestral villa to raise the necessary funds, he set out for Rome, taking with him his young pupil and friend Donatello. Little

did he foresee at that bitter moment that this failure was to be the direct stepping-stone to his great success. At Rome he busied himself in studying antique monuments, throwing away his fortune as many thought in expensive excavations, but absorbing the principles of classic architecture, learning many a secret and many a long-forgotten law of beauty of which he was soon to be the great exponent. By his side Donatello laboured and studied, and seed-thoughts groped for but dropped by the older man fell into vivifying soil in the youth's imagination, and in that companionship of genius the Renaissance was begun. Most exhaustively of all the monuments of antiquity Brunelleschi studied the dome of the Pantheon until other principles hitherto undreamed of in domical construction were made clear to him as by inspiration, and the Duomo of Florence, no longer a mirage of his dreams but comprehended in its every curve was drawn and modelled, a mathematical fact. These drawings and models upon his return convinced the signory and the dome of the cathedral sprang into being to his eternal fame and the glory of Florence.

With della Quercia matters were far different. He had no paternal estates to sell, no

prospects of future commissions; the competition had been his unique hope, and during the year devoted to it he had exhausted his means of support. With the present frustration of his hopes a gulf seemed to yawn before him, the end of all things.

Searching his pockets for a possible stray florin, he came upon the letter of introduction to Brunelleschi, as yet unrepresented. He knew the architect to be successful and in receipt of orders from the nobility, and the thought came to him that their common disappointment might elicit Brunelleschi's sympathy and secure him employment.

Della Quercia had not visited Petraia since Donatello had released him from imprisonment, for, though the Marchesa del Carretto had assured him that her husband had exonerated him from the charge of stealing the dagger he had not chosen to jeopardise his chance of winning the competition by venturing into the stronghold of the rough, old condottiere. Now, however, his liberty was not of so great consequence, and he took his way on foot to the fortress-villa. Arrived at the entrance to Brunelleschi's tower he learned for the first time that the architect had sold it and had gone to Rome. Other news he heard also which

determined him to make no stay at Petraia and to leave without announcing his call.

An event of great public importance had transpired. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, the powerful Lord of Milan, who had terrorised all northern Italy, at the very moment when his ambition of uniting it in one great Lombardic despotism seemed about to be fulfilled, had bowed his haughty head like one of the meanest of his subjects at the coming of the Black Death.

Florence had been on the point of capitulation, but the sons of Gian Galeazzo had not the ability to carry out their father's schemes, and Filippo Maria had come to treat—not for her surrender—but for an honourable peace. He was in Petraia at the present moment, so the servant told della Quercia, again the guest of his relative, and the young sculptor who had no desire for renewing his acquaintance hastily left the villa. He was now quite desperate, for his last hope had failed. He could indeed make his way on foot to Siena but this was not such a home-coming as he had dreamed, and who would give him work even there when his failure was known?

In his dejection he had kept his gaze fixed upon the ground and had not noticed the ap-

proach of a travelling carriage until it was close upon him, and an outrider demanded if he were not that famous sculptor, Messer Jacopo della Quercia, lately a guest at Sir John Hawkwood's villa of Petraia.

"I am indeed della Quercia, and am but just come from Petraia," replied the young man, "but I am at a loss to know how you recognised me."

"It would be stranger if I had forgotten you," replied the other, "for it was just about here that you came a year ago to our assistance. I am the Lord of Lucca's man, and I bring you a letter from his lady, who told me that I would find you at Petraia."

Della Quercia wonderingly opened the letter which ran as follows:

"MY VALIANT FRIEND:

"I am grieved that love for one so little worthy should have troubled your great heart. Believe me, dear friend, the time will come when you will laugh at this delusion. I had heard of your disappointment in the matter of the competition; that, too, will count as the merest trifle when the story of your life is told. Other achievements wait for you, and other felicities. In the meantime I am indeed happy if my friendship can give you consolation and help

you to tide over this season of discouragement. Come, therefore, with all welcome to our villa of Collodi, where my husband would be as rejoiced as I am to receive you were he not in Genoa, distracted by public matters. Your offer to ornament our garden falls in well with my own desire. You shall execute some noble work here with which I will surprise and delight my lord when next he comes. Think, think at once what it shall be, for work such as yours, glorious and immortal, should be the best solace for frustrated desires. I who am but a weak woman, with no such resource, envy you this unfailing medicament for an aching heart.

“ Faithfully yours,

“ ILARIA.”

Della Quercia could hardly believe his eyes, and he read and reread this letter with increasing bewilderment.

How did the Marchesa del Carretto know of his failure and his desperation? He had not written her or offered to execute any sculpture for her villa, though nothing would now please him more than to do so. How, too, did she know of his whereabouts? Could the Signora Donnana Hawkwood have written? Surely not for she was no friend of

his, nor had she any means of knowing that on this particular morning he would visit Petraia. It was all as great a miracle as if the Virgin Mary had sent a letter to the Marchesa in his stead. He began to think that such a miracle had been wrought and was only awakened from his dazed condition by the coachman, who besought him to enter the carriage, and who asked if he should proceed to Petraia for his Excellency's baggage or return at once to Collodi. "To Collodi by all means," della Quercia replied, "I have all that I require in this knapsack," and he sank back upon the comfortable cushions, resigned to accept unquestioningly the blessings which the gods had so mysteriously and opportunely conferred.

Strange indeed was the chance which had thrown this good fortune in della Quercia's way at this moment of his deepest need, but Satan had had more to do with it than the saints. Filippo Maria Visconti finding himself once more within a day's journey of the estates of the Guinigis had determined to make a last effort to secure the Marchesa with her consent if possible or, failing that, by force. He had accordingly written from Petraia a letter which would not be likely to commit him

if it fell into other hands, but which he believed Ilaria could not fail to understand.

But the Lady of Lucca, who had never seen Visconti's handwriting or that of della Quercia, and who believed the former was now in the neighbourhood of Genoa in conference with her husband, imagined that the appeal had been sent her by the young sculptor, and indeed the circumstances alluded to with the exception of the declaration of love for herself, fitted his case as well as that of Visconti.

It was therefore with generous sympathy that she had read and responded to this subtle and misleading appeal to her pity.

"Most worshipful and dearly worshipped Lady," ran Visconti's letter.

"Your humble servitor who, at some small risk proved his devotion to you a year since in the mountains near Sesto, and who as madly lifted eyes of unavailing worship to your divinity while we were both guests of the valiant Sir John Hawkwood,—now writes on the slight chance that you in your infinite condescension may pity his wretchedness.

"He will not enlarge on the trial and sorrow which the year has brought him, of which you have doubtless already heard, but he would have you to know that through these weary

days your face has been his guiding star, from which his soul has never swerved. He asks you not now for love, only for forgiveness for having ever so presumed, and to be allowed to touch your hand in friendship. This will be guerdon enough for the risk of his life, and will give him courage to pass on to whatever dark destiny the Heavens may call him.

"He has informed himself that you are at your villa of Collodi not so far distant from Petraia, where he now lies, and where a message will reach him if sent quickly. Your lord is at Lucca, and you are mistress of your own actions. Surely it will in no whit disparage you if it is known that you have sent to Florence bidding a craftsman come to you to offer plans for the decoration of your villa. Send therefore such a message addressed thus:

'To

'Mona Donnana Hawkwood,

'Villa Petraia.

To be delivered to a certain statuary whom she wots of.'

"And be assured it will safely reach and will snatch from despair one who until death remains your

"LOYAL SERVITOR."

"Della Quercia is mad," Ilaria had said to

herself as she put the letter aside, "but all the same he is to be pitied. I doubt not that I can restore him to his senses for I have seen many another recover from this same love-sickness, but disappointed ambition and poverty are more serious maladies, and need quick remedies which fortunately, I may be able to administer."

Arrived at the villa of the Guinigis della Quercia found the Marchesa waiting at its entrance where she had evidently been watching for his coming. No words could have been kinder than the sidelong look which she darted at him, or any smile more bewitching than the one which flickered about her lips. But an inexplicable embarrassment seemed to restrain and render formal her greeting.

"You can understand," she said, "that until my husband arrives it will be impossible for me to receive you here. I have therefore arranged for your entertainment with the miller at the foot of the hill. You must be wearied with your journey. To-morrow I will show you the grounds and you shall advise me as to how we can ornament them."

Thus dismissed della Quercia betook himself to the mill where the miller's buxom wife

gave him a hearty welcome. "My lady has bidden me make you as comfortable as I can," she said. "You are to have my best room, and that shed for your workshop. There are marble quarries in the mountains and you are to give my husband the dimensions of the blocks you need; he will see that they are brought. Meantime your supper is waiting."

Della Quercia was early astir, exploring the grounds of the villa, and mentally planning a series of terraces with fountains for the hill-side. The Marchesa joined him later and listened patiently to his schemes for enlarging and beautifying the estate. "Yes, yes," she assented, but that slope belongs to the villa of the Bishop of Lucca, who has often said that it should be transformed into a mount of pilgrimage with wayside chapels. I will introduce you to our neighbour, who will doubtless be glad to avail himself of your services."

"I would rather execute something for you," della Quercia replied, "even if it were less pretentious than for all bishops in the world."

"Nay," she answered. "We must not hide the light of your genius under our little bushel."

My husband is more interested in fortifying Collodi than in embellishing it. I shall invite the Bishop to meet you to-morrow."

"As you please," della Quercia acquiesced, "so long as you do not drive me from Collodi; but I thought that you sent for me to make some agreeable surprise for your husband."

"That is true," she agreed, "but I wanted also to help you in the very best way possible. If others can offer a wider scope for your efforts we must not allow our selfish enjoyment of your society to interfere with an opportunity which will bring you distinction. I want most of all, you see, to prove that a disinterested friendship like our own can exist between an honourable man and woman."

"You have proved it *Madonna mia*," della Quercia replied, "and I am deeply grateful." But he was mystified as well, for they were now fairly in the midst of the little comedy of misunderstanding, and he was at a loss to explain why she felt it necessary to assert continually that there was no romance between them? She seemed to him strangely fickle, now displaying an almost maternal interest in his career and again treating him with the

most marked neglect and even rudeness. But upon one memorable day light broke in even upon his abnormal modesty. After much insistence that the Lord of Lucca would be better pleased with her portrait-bust than with anything else which he could model or she could give, della Quercia had at last persuaded Ilaria to sit for him.

He had found a deposit of such clay as he liked best near the mill, and had roughly blocked in a head which in its carriage and proportions was a likeness even before her first sitting. But when she really posed for him his fingers fairly flew, manipulating the clay as by magic, retouching, paring away a little here, rounding a contour there, stroking, patting, caressing the inert mass until it blossomed into Ilaria's very semblance. From time to time he would toss his hair back from his eyes and at a little distance glance keenly from his growing work to her interested face then back to the bust with pardonable pride, and settle to his task with a renewed phrensy of creation. But at last his dazzled eyes swam with weariness and he could no longer trust their report.

"By your leave, Madonna," he said respectfully, as he washed his hands, and before she

had time to comprehend what he wished to do he had passed the tips of his sentient fingers gently over her face reading every curve as only the fingers of the blind and of sculptors can read.

The act had so surprised Ilaria that she made no resistance, but she stiffened instinctively under his touch, and as his hand glided beneath her chin tracing the delicious flow of the lines as they melted into the stately throat, the hot blood surged to her cheeks and she found her voice.

"Stop!" she commanded indignantly. "How dare you?"

"Your pardon, Signora," he besought, "a sculptor's hands are but his second eyes, and perceive more than the first."

"They perceive too much," she cried, "and if I must submit to a liberty such as this in order to secure a statue of myself then will I wait for it until my husband turns sculptor."

Della Quercia could not believe her in earnest, and laughed merrily. "Think of my hands only as tools, dear Lady, for indeed they are but that. Surely you can not think that I would offer you the least disrespect. See, Madonna, your clay likeness knows that

my fingers have no thought save for my work. Can you not feel for them the same indifference?"

"And do you perceive no difference," she asked, "between pulsing, quivering flesh and a lump of clay?"

"I have had many models," he replied, "and some of them women of surpassing beauty, but never as my hand learned by heart every curve of their perfect bodies have my pulses thrilled with other passion than for my art. Never but once have I felt myself incapable of forgetting the man in the artist, and then I refused to attempt the ordeal."

"And why was that?" the Marchesa asked wonderingly.

"It was because I loved," he replied frankly. "When Gemma Donati, the most beautiful girl in Siena, whom I then hoped would one day be my wife, offered of her own volition to pose for my statue of *Eve* I refused her great condescension, dearly as I appreciated it, for love and love alone can take away a man's mastery over himself."

The Marchesa's face underwent a surprising change while della Quercia spoke. "You say that you once loved, once hoped" she re-

peated, "how does it happen that you do so no longer?"

"Alas! sweet Patroness. I still love though I no longer hope. Gemma's father is one of the noble Signori of Siena. When I besought her hand from him he flung the taunt in my face that I wanted his influence with the other city fathers to obtain the commission for the fountain in the great square. Whereas I had only sought the fountain to prove myself worthy of Gemma, and not Gemma to secure the fountain. So I told him that I would go to Florence and prove my pre-eminence over the greatest artists of the day with such clearness that Siena would beg for my work and not I for it. With that he laughed, and told me that when my gates were hung then should I have Gemma, and the fountain, but neither of them before. Gemma too bade me go and measure myself with my mates, nor come again until I had made myself illustrious. I thought then that she sent me away so lightly because she was confident in my success; but perchance she was only mercenary and has even now selected my successor from among the rich young gallants of Siena. For the past year God knows with what single purpose I have toiled, and the passion which has given

a fierce joy to the struggle which has sustained me through the alternate fever of hope and chill of defeat has not been ambition for its own sake, but for Gemma's sake. Not love of Art but love of Gemma. And when that glamour passed and I knew that I had lost the prize for which I had given my whole heart, but for your incredible goodness I would have died. You saved me, dear Lady, and perhaps as you wrote me I shall in time learn to laugh at my lost illusions. Deign, sovereign Lady, to allow me to continue your statue for from this hour I belong only to Art."

"Nay my friend," Ilaria answered. "Now and for ever to Gemma. A way will be found and perhaps sooner than you think to bring you together again. Put away your tools, for I shall sit for you no more."

"But *Madonna mia* you misunderstand my feeling toward you," he cried.

She looked at him reproachfully. "At least I understand myself," she replied, and to this parting word he had no answer, for suddenly a conviction so momentous that it took away his breath, so incredible that it stopped for a moment the beating of his heart, dawned upon him—Ilaria loved him.

This peerless lady loved him, and he in his

unpardonable blindness had stabbed her to the heart telling her of his love for another woman—it was brutal, monstrous, and all the more so because it was irreparable. The blow had been struck and no word of his could take it back.

How long he sat staring stupidly at his unfinished statue he did not know. He was roused from his trance by an unwonted commotion, hurried footsteps, and a masterful and angry voice, which he recognised as that of Paolo Guinigi.

“Where is he,” it shouted, “this man whom my wife receives as her guest in my absence? On your guard, Visconti, double traitor that you are, breaking your rendezvous with me to keep one with my wife!” and the Lord of Lucca, his unsheathed sword in hand, burst furiously into the room.

But della Quercia’s astonishment was as nothing to that of Guinigi’s as he stood staring at the young sculptor with unbelieving eyes. Gradually the purple colour subsided from his face and he burst into a loud laugh.

“On my soul,” he said, “they told the truth—it *is* the statuary!”

“Of a certainty, your Excellency,” della Quercia replied, “but if my presence displeases

you, I trust my work may not," and he pointed proudly to the statue.

"Nay, I am pleased with both," replied the other, "but what coil is this? You surely never wrote this letter which I have but just discovered in my wife's closet, begging her to receive you as her guest?"

"I have never written a letter of any sort to your gracious lady, your Excellency, but as my coming hither is in many respects inexplicable to myself, I beg your permission to read it."

And as della Quercia read the missive he saw how Ilaria had totally misunderstood it, how she had fancied that he was the writer and had had reason to believe until now that he loved her. The expressions on his face as they varied from stupefaction to intelligence and thence to indignation rejoiced Guinigi.

"Needs not spoken word," he exclaimed, "for I know the script to be that of Filippo Maria Visconti, who would have stolen into my home and have robbed me of my wife. But how comes it that you tricked the trickster, and took his place so patly? For when my servants told me that on the receipt of this letter my wife had sent her carriage for

a guest whom she kept at this mill, I had no other thought but that it was he."

As della Quercia explained the circumstances Guinigi's merriment grew apace. "But no whisper of this to Ilaria," he commanded. "It is clear that she had no suspicion of this scoundrel's villainy, but fancied that, after the manner of troubadours, you paid her high sounding but empty compliments while you sought her friendly aid. I would not insult her with my doubt, which indeed lasted but for an instant, or have her know to what a colossus of stupidity she is wedded."

Then turning to the bust he praised it heartily, and drawing the young sculptor's arm within his own compelled him to accompany him to the villa where, to the surprise of his servants, he announced that della Quercia was henceforth to be lodged.

In such good fellowship the Marchesa found them when she returned shortly from a call upon the Bishop of Lucca; but though she had hoped that the harbourage which she had offered to the unfortunate sculptor would not displease her lord, she was at a loss to understand his excessive friendliness and jocularly. She gave it little heed, however, for a great relief had come to her in the knowledge

that della Quercia's imagined infatuation for herself was slighter than she had feared, and to this release from anxiety was added a new joy, that of being the bearer of good news.

Her neighbour had a guest, Archbishop d' Arli of Bologna, who had informed her that the Bolognese were erecting a new church which they hoped to make the most magnificent in all the world.

The archbishop had seen the designs submitted in competition for the doors of the Baptistery, and in his opinion neither Ghiberti nor Brunelleschi deserved the prize, for della Quercia had surpassed them both.

Ilaria had fanned the flame of appreciation until the Archbishop of Bologna had announced that he considered himself fortunate to have come upon the young genius so opportunely, for nothing would make him so happy as to secure his services for the new church.

"So," concluded Ilaria, "your doors shall have a setting nobler even than the Baptistery of Florence, and there will be a wedding soon in Siena for which I must at once begin to gather the chest of plate which is to be my gift to the bride."

"A pretty story," commented the Lord of Lucca, when taken into confidence. "But why this unseemly haste in leaving us? My wife's statue so far as it is fashioned is perfect, but only the head is finished, and I would have the full-length figure. You will come again some day and carve it for me?"

"I will come whenever the Marchesa wishes," della Quercia replied, and content with this promise Guinigi strode away.

The young sculptor lifted grateful eyes to Ilaria. "You have done so much for me," he said, "when may I come again?"

"Not while I live, Dear Friend," she answered gently. Their eyes fell, for the hearts of both were filled with deluded sympathy for a sorrow that had no existence, for save in the purest friendship neither had loved the other.

Della Quercia completed triumphantly the wonderful portal of San Petronio of Bologna, those carvings which Michael Angelo admired and studied, and which placed della Quercia in the foremost rank of the artists of his day, but before Bologna was willing to relinquish him Siena called him to design her Fonte Gaia and to his marriage with Gemma. The rivalry of the two cities continued until his



TOMB OF ILARIA DEL CARRETTO, WIFE OF PAOLO GUINIGI
In cathedral of Lucca. By Jacopo della Quercia

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death, and his time was divided between their commissions.

Once only did he put both Bologna and Siena aside in deference to the desires of a private individual. It was Paolo Guinigi who reminded della Quercia of his promise to execute a statute of Ilaria, for Death had given him her permission to return. Even then, when the beautiful face would shrink no more than any other clay at the touch of his forming fingers, he respected her wishes, and the wonderful figure, the most exquisite which any sculptor of any period has carved upon a tomb, was a work of the heart rather than of the hands. While he laboured his memory showed her to him as he first saw her in that never-to-be-forgotten trance, which was neither sleep nor death, and as he recalled her friendship his soul must have cried aloud in the words of Dante's friend ¹:

Ay me! the calm, erect, dignified walk,

Ay me! the sweet salute.

The thoughtful mind, the wit discreetly worn;

Ay me! the clearness of her noble talk,

¹ *The Lament for Selvaggia*, by Cino da Pistoja. Translated by Rossetti. This poem was very probably familiar to della Quercia. With the exception of Dante's tribute to Beatrice it is the only literary work up to that time which can compare with della Quercia's own artistry for "beauty making beautiful old rhyme in praise of ladies dead."

Which made the good take root
In me, and for the evil woke the scorn.
Ay me! the longing born
Of so much loveliness,
The hope whose eager stress
Made other hopes fall back to let it pass,
Even till my load of love grew light thereby!
These thou hast broken as glass,
O Death, who makest me alive to die!



CHAPTER VI

“ALLEGRO.”

[Being a chronicle of certain events in the campaigns of the French in Italy, written down many years after their occurrence from the dictation of the illustrious Knight Yves d' Allegre, at his château in Auvergne.]

I

DEFIANT as the scornful face of some captive queen, who meets the gaze of her conqueror with undisguised hatred, so the grandiose pile of the fortress-villa of the Farnese gloomed down upon me as I drew rein before it that chill morning of November, 1494.

And yet that proud house should have feared me, for I came as the representative of his victorious majesty Charles the Eighth of France, prepared, with the assistance of the troop of horse at my back, to make my own

terms with its lord or lady and to demand the show of welcome as well as entertainment.

But a genuinely hearty welcome was precisely what we were not to have. It mattered nothing that our passage through Lombardy and Tuscany had been a triumphal progress, and that Charles was now near at hand at Viterbo waiting to grant Alexander Borgia the poor consolation of the pretence of voluntarily inviting the French army to spend Christmas at Rome; and that I, Yves d'Allegre, was accredited with having the doughtiest courage and the least patience of any knight in France. It would seem, I say, that the owners of the villa were entirely ignorant of these things, and of the fact that my band of rough companions would have loved nothing better than to have pillaged and burned this sumptuously appointed château; for it glowered at us with shuttered windows and lowered portcullis, the Farnese lily fluttering arrogantly from its highest tower.

And I do not say that, if the fortress had been properly garrisoned and munitioned, its reduction might not have given us a pretty siege, for both castle and grounds were well placed by nature on a commanding eminence, and were surrounded moreover by an enceinte

of walls and moats some three miles in circumference. But for all its forbidding aspect the château was in no condition to resist us, for the men-at-arms had run away, leaving only a handful of devoted house-servants.

There appeared to be but one postern-gate, and placing a guard there, and deploying skirmishers, I drew up the main body of my soldiers before the principal entrance.

Here when my trumpeter sounded a parley the drawbridge was lowered and the seneschal, bearing a white flag, brought me the keys of the castle, with a daintily perfumed note which reads as follows:

“To the most illustrious and most honourable Commander of the French forces:

“Our villa of Caprarola is hereby placed at your disposal with all its contents. We beg only that our servants may enjoy your Highness’s protection, and that the small hunting-park beyond the garden may be unmolested as it is stocked with valuable game. Our own keepers have orders to supply your table with as much venison as you may require. Trusting implicitly in your honour as a knight and gentleman to grant this one request, and hoping to extend to your Excellency during Holy week the hospitality of our Roman palace

(whither we now make all speed to repair to have all in readiness for your reception), we remain your loving host,

“ALESSANDRO FARNESE.”

I read the letter twice, not knowing what to make of it. Was it written in all sincerity, or was the rogue laughing at me?

One thing was certain—the Cardinal, whom we had hoped to trap, had slipped away to Rome.

If recently, then a detachment of my band which I had ordered to patrol the road in that direction might still overtake him, and in the meantime, the suggestion of food and drink conveyed by the letter appealing to hungry men, I made all speed to avail myself of the proffered hospitality.

The interior of the château was a pleasant surprise after the unfriendly impression created by the gloomy exterior; for cooks were busy in the great kitchens roasting, boiling, and baking, and in the lower hall long tables groaned, and a butt of wine was broached for my men, while more delicate viands and an older vintage were spread in the state banquet room for my own use.

After dinner I made the rounds of all the apartments, and certes I was amazed by the

luxury which met me on every side. The cardinal had evidently only had time to remove the more easily portable of his treasures, such as money, plate, and jewels, for sumptuous stuffs and tapestries and paintings, of which I had not the knowledge to estimate the value, decorated the walls.

Although of noble birth I had been bred simply in the rude château of my ancestors in the most savage part of Auvergne, my education limited to the instruction of the friars at the neighbouring abbey of La Chaise Dieu and to the practice of woodcraft and of arms. My forebears had been such fighters as Bertrand du Guesclin, and what I saw in Italy was a great revelation to me, as to all of the French soldiers. We had not imagined that such luxury existed, and even for King Charles himself this expedition was an education in the arts.

As I now passed from room to room the inlaid armour, carved furniture, sculpture, cases of medals, coins, and other costly curios filled me with amazement. Finally, when dazed by so much magnificence I had made the rounds of the apartments on the first floor and had arrived again at the one by which I had entered, attendants threw open a door which

disclosed at the rear of the palace a garden sentinelled by giant cypresses.

This garden was simply a level space laid out by box hedges in fanciful patterns making what we call in France a *parterre à broderie* and backed by the strong walls of the fortifications. On one side this wall was parapeted, giving a view of the broad champaign, on whose horizon the sun was setting; on a second side was the castle, and on the others (but still within the fortifications) the land rose steeply to a wooded hill separated from the garden by a high wall.

As I paced this part of the *parterre* I came upon an iron grille through whose openings I could make out only the coppice left in its natural state, suggesting that the cultivated garden ended here, and that all beyond was the enclosed bit of wild forest, the deer preserve to which the cardinal's letter alluded. The grille was locked, but I doubted not that its key was among those which the seneschal had presented me.

The very mystery of the tangled wood in the fading light tempted me to explore it, but the toothsome dinner had not only put me in the amiable humour to respect my host's request not to poach upon his game, but had

also (and this was probably foreseen by the writer of the letter) removed for the present desire for violent exercise of any kind. I therefore contented myself with the determination to be up betimes for an early exploration of the park and, ensconcing myself soon after in the great *lit-de-parade* with its gilded baldachin, surmounted by the cardinal's crest and hung with crimson satin, dreamed that I was a prince of the Church and heir to all the glories of the Farnese.

Morning showed me my mistake, for by slothfully putting off my visit to the preserves I had very nearly lost better game than ever scampered upon four legs.

The captain of the watch reported that an elegant travelling litter, borne between mules, had been captured on the road leading to Rome. This litter had been escorted by a band of horsemen who had incontinently fled at the approach of my troop. The strangest part of the story was that the party, instead of being headed toward Rome as though fleeing from our approach, were quietly trotting toward the castle.

What could this mean? Not, surely, that visitors to the cardinal had been frightened away by finding the villa invested by our

forces. It seemed more probable to me that some one had sent this convoy for the use of the occupants of the villa, under the impression that they had not yet left it. And suddenly I asked myself the question,—had they then all really escaped? Might not some one dear to the cardinal still be in hiding in the castle?

But a stricter search convinced me of the impossibility of such concealment. There were evidences of a lady's recent habitation: a dainty suite of rooms deserted in haste, coffers emptied of their contents, and cabinets with their drawers lying upon the floor, rifled, as I fancied, by the guards who should have protected the castle. But there seemed no possibility of secret chambers in the walls, for, as I carefully paced and measured the floors, I found every inch of space accounted for. The seneschal, a timid man, told me that the cardinal's sister, Giulia Farnese, had occupied the villa for a time, after her brother's departure, but that she too had fled, without doubt to join her brother in Rome.

It was for this sister, then, that the litter and escort had been sent. I did not believe that she had reached Rome; possibly they had missed each other on the road. Again this seemed unlikely, and I came back to the haunting idea

that the Cardinal's sister might be hidden in some hunting lodge in the little enclosed forest which I had been so suspiciously asked to respect.

I accordingly announced to the seneschal my intention of taking a walk in this demesne, and I was convinced by the alarm which showed in the fellow's face that I had hit upon the right clue. He brought me the game-keeper, whose services I declined, well knowing that he would lead me wrong, and disdaining the warnings that there were concealed traps, into which I might fall, and a stag which was accounted dangerous I posted two of my trusty lieutenants at the gate, with orders to come at once if they heard my whistle, so entered the charmed wood alone.

I call it charmed, because, though of small extent, it was such a labyrinth of tangled, twisting paths, choked with undergrowth, that though I tramped the entire morning I seemed to myself to be under the spell of some enchanter, wandering in a circle, ever coming back to my starting point and by no means discovering all the capacities which the wood might hold for concealment. What further excited my suspicions was the fact that, except for a few tame deer which I scarcely fright-

ened as I passed, I saw no game of any kind. The cardinal's request had therefore been a mere subterfuge. But if there was no game neither was there any trace of human beings or their habitation, and I returned to the castle thwarted and surly. Dinner somewhat refreshed me, as did the news that a fellow in the papal livery, belonging to the escort of the mysterious travelling carriage, had been captured on the road to Rome, he having fallen behind his companions on account of the lameness of his horse. This man confessed that the convoy had been sent by the Pope to rescue the Signorina Giulia Farnese, *who was still at the villa*, and he furnished me with additional information of a most useful character.

The rescuers had received orders to hide until night in the covert of a neighbouring wood, when, having first made and received signals by the waving of torches, they were to steal to the postern-gate (killing the sentinels if need be, but as noiselessly as possible), and on hooting three times like an owl they would be joined by the lady.

This was news indeed, and I proceeded that evening to act upon it. The renegade made the torch signals as agreed upon, and, as the night was partly clear, I had the litter brought

out in front of the gate, where I doubted not that it would be seen by eyes upon the watch, and posting myself with my lieutenant in front of the gate, we imitated the screeching of owls to the best of our ability. Our stratagem succeeded to a marvel. There was presently a rattle of bars and chains, the gate flew open, and a beautiful young woman fell into my embrace.

She was no too loving an armful, for the instant she felt herself a prisoner she fell to screaming, scratching, and kicking like the low-lived, sturdy peasant-girl that she was. I knew at once that I had to do with no high-born Farnese lily, but had trapped her maid, while my subordinate with better luck sustained in his arms the fainting mistress. One glance at her gentle face told me this, and filled my heart with ruth for the fright we had caused her. Meantime my pretty termagant had scratched my face until it bled, and had her fingers most unpleasantly entwined in my hair. I shook her roughly until I had reduced her to submission, and then bade her return as she had descended, showing us the way to her retreat that we might give her mistress the attention which she needed. As she grasped the idea that, though captors, we were still

gentlemen she sullenly led us up a long and narrow staircase between two walls to a terrace at the summit of the hill which the fortifications circled.

This open space was surrounded by a high wall, below which, and separating it from the castle, was the tangled deer park. One glance at the ingenious planning from this point of vantage made clear how I had wandered around and around the hill without ever finding my way to the hidden plaisance at the top. Into the pillared loggia of a garden house (such as the Italian call a casino) we bore our lovely burden, and after dashing water upon the white face we were rewarded,—first by the flicker of eyelids over shy blue eyes, and then by a gesture of entreaty as she looked about her in startled consciousness of what had happened.

“Do not be alarmed, Madam,” I said in my best Italian, “I am indeed the commander of the French forces, at present quartered in your château; but I am here as your protector, and your wishes shall be obeyed.”

“Then let us go free,” demanded the maid, “give us your safe conduct to proceed at once to Rome.”

“You have asked,” I replied, “what I



CASINO AT CAPRAROLA
Northern façade on slope of hill

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can not grant. His Majesty's orders are to detain you until the receipt of further instructions."

The lady seemed too much overcome to reply, but her bold handmaiden answered saucily, "The King of France is in pretty business to send a detachment of his soldiers to make prisoners of two serving maids."

"You credit me with little discrimination," I replied. "I can recognise a lady before she speaks. I am perfectly aware that your mistress is the Signorina Giulia, sister of his Eminence Cardinal Alessandro Farnese."

The impudent hussy burst into well-feigned laughter. "The boor fancies that you are my mistress," she sneered, and the lady, recovering herself, attempted to disclaim my discovery. "No, no, you mistake," she reiterated, blushing, but I knew that I had made no mistake, for the maid faced me again with the frank admission: "Since there is no deceiving you we acknowledge that you are right. You have fairly trapped the Cardinal's sister. He will pay you a fat ransom for your prize, if you will send me to Rome to arrange it."

"You will oblige me by keeping your place, and by holding your tongue," I replied somewhat nettled; "whatever negotiations are to

be effected will be arranged directly with your mistress without your assistance."

She gave me a queer look in which anger was replaced by scornful mirth as with a toss of her head she asked the Lady Giulia: "Has your ladyship any commands for these ruffians?"

"Only, Most Illustrious," the lady replied, "that you will grant the request which my companion has made and consent to her carrying the news of my capture to the Cardinal."

The voice was sweeter than any music I had ever heard and the face the loveliest I have ever looked upon. I had to steel my heart as I replied: "Unfortunately, noble lady, this is impossible. My orders are explicit. I can allow no one of whatever condition to leave the villa under any pretext."

The signora bit her lips. "Then, I have but one favour to ask," she said. "Will you allow your prisoners security and privacy in this little casino until their fate is determined?"

"Of a surety," I replied. "I will be your sentry and will so far as I am able see that your every wish is granted."

The scowling maid sniffed audibly; but the Lady Giulia's eyes were full of wistful gratitude. I clattered back to the castle perturbed

by mingled emotions, but buoyed up and swept onward by an under-current of strange joy whose trend at that time I was far from comprehending.

One of her stipulations I found it hard to grant. She had asked for isolation, and, though I might have abused my power as her gaoler, I felt that so least of all had I any right to intrude upon her. So I held myself aloof for the next three days, making myself, and (as I afterwards ascertained) my captive also, miserable by adhering scrupulously to the letter of her demands.

II

While respecting as I supposed the wishes of these ladies, and furnishing them through the seneschal with every luxury and comfort, excepting that of liberty and society, I was in reality unwittingly condemning them to the tedium of almost solitary imprisonment, and depriving myself at the same time of the privilege of meeting the one woman who had thrilled me with more than a transitory admiration.

How long this state of affairs might have continued I do not know if the ladies had not themselves ended it.

The bold, dark girl, who told me that her name was Faustina, brought me one morning a spoken message from Giulia Farnese to the effect that she was dying with *ennui*, and since other guests were not available she would be glad of my company for luncheon.

"The bidding may be that of your mistress," I said, looking at Faustina steadily, "but I believe that the wording is your own, and I tell you freely that I do not like it, nor will I accept an invitation couched in such uncomplimentary terms.

The girl laughed. "Your surliness, my high and mighty Signor, does not in the least deceive me. It is only bravado to conceal cowardice. You are afraid of us."

"I have run from women before," I replied, "and I make no shame of it, since I have run from nothing else. My business in life is not that of a mountebank to amuse idle women."

"So that is the answer which I am to return to the Signorina's gracious condescension?" she asked, tossing her head scornfully.

"Nay," I replied. "It is my answer to your pertness, for I give back like for like. I believe in my soul that your lady's intention was to be gracious. Say to her therefore that

Yves d'Allegre accepts the invitation in the same spirit in which it is proffered, be that what it may."

"Very good, Allegro, and since her desire is to pass the afternoon agreeably, if you have any knowledge of music, as your name would signify, choose from the instruments in the concert chamber what you will, and bid our chapel-master to join us after collation, for his voice is a fine tenor, fitted as well for glees and catches as for the intoning of *Misereres* and *Magnificats*."

Now, as good luck had it, though little taught, I am gifted by nature with a roaring basso, so that we formed in time a pretty quartette the chapel-master giving me private lessons in the Italian method, and the Signorina taking great interest in my progress. The afternoon concerts became a daily programme, and as my voice sustained her soprano I felt in all my soul how we complemented each other.

Not the maid alone, but the mistress also, called me Allegro, at first in mischance, and when I told her that the d' Allegres were not a joyous race, but gloomy and savage as their dreary castle, built of sad grey scorix and perched upon the brink of an extinct volcano,

—still in sweet wilfulness the Signorina would have it (and her intuition was not far wrong) that, however stern my forebears might have been, I was still merry-hearted Allegro, the son of mirth and joy.

She varied the name according as she divined my mood. Was I animated, she called me *Allegro Vivace*, or even *Brio*; was I gloomy, I was *Allegro Furioso*; if I explained my ambitions she named me *Allegro Energico* or *Resoluto*. I was ever a man of moods, and she recognised them without spoken word and had power to rouse or soothe them. One evening when her beauty wrought upon my spirit like wine, and I was gay beyond my wont, intoxicated by a man's first love that recks not of obstacles, she said that I was *Allegro con Fuocco*, *Allegro di Bravura*.

I knew now that I loved her, but in my saner moments I could not hope that this rare creature could ever care for a rude barbarian invader, and I would never have dared to tell her of my passion but for a fortunate circumstance.

Entering one afternoon the loggia of the casino somewhat earlier than was my wont, I heard within the sound of bitter weeping, together with this startling avowal:

"I cannot, cannot deceive him longer, for, wonderful though it is, I know that he loves me."

It was the Lady Giulia, and though I had never told her of my hopeless passion I knew that she spoke of me, and this divine pity was only what I would have expected of her.

"What of that?" scoffed Faustina. "Is it not what we have counted on and laboured for? You will wind this savage about your little finger until he will forget his allegiance to his king and let us go free."

"He will not," replied the Signorina. "He is the soul of honour and will never betray his trust. Nor will I tempt him from his duty, for though so unworthy I love him, and I will tell him all the truth."

"And lose your life for your pains, for I also have a tongue in my head."

With this threat the incomprehensible girl left the room, and I, dazed and striving in vain to comprehend all that I had heard, took two steps to quit the loggia, but turned again upon my heel as I realised that after all nothing else mattered since she loved me. The Lady Giulia heard the sound of my footsteps on the tessellated pavement and caught aside the

tapestry hangings, her face paling and flushing with confusion.

"You overheard us, Allegro?"

"Thank God, yes," I answered and she took covert in my arms like a frightened child. But after that first embrace she drew from me a little.

"I have somewhat on my conscience to confess, Allegro, after which you may not love me so well."

"Say what you will," I replied, "so that you say also that you love me and will go with me when our trumpets sound return to that old château in Auvergne of which I have told you."

"But, Allegro, what if in so doing you take a dowerless bride, an outcast, denied even the name I bear?"

"It is not rank or wealth which I love, but you," I protested, "repudiation cannot make you less noble. The anger of your family cannot really degrade you."

"But if I am not what I seem?" she persisted.

"Rich or poor, noble or base-born, angel or spirit of evil, you are still you, and naught in heaven or hell shall part us, I swear, so only that you love me."

"Thank God for that, Allegro," she replied, "for if your love is great enough for forgiveness—if, when you learn how I have deceived you, you love me still—then indeed I will repay your magnanimity with the devotion of my life."

"So long as you deceive me not in telling me that you love me, you need tell me nothing else," I answered, "for the past is as though it had not been and love has made all things new."

So we were betrothed, and were blissfully happy. It mattered not that there was a secret chamber in her past. I had no desire to enter it. It could not be so very evil since she herself was pure as a lily. Thus I comforted myself, poor fool, never recking in what foul pools some lilies have their birth and nurture.

It was naught to me that the hateful maid knew of our happiness and that I read derision in her smile. Nothing that she knew, nothing that God himself knew, could part me from my Giulia,—and great as the test was, and though I flinched at the first when it was sprung upon me, I thank Heaven that in the end my love was great enough to bear it.

There came a time when I was Allegro no longer, for a startling revelation swept all

mirth from my heart; but (and this it was caused my torture) though faith and joy were dead love refused to die.

The sorrowful disillusion of which I speak was wrought in this wise:

My friend and comrade Louis d' Ars was despatched to Caprarola, some two weeks after my arrival, with instructions from King Charles, who was well pleased to learn that I had trapped the cardinal's sister and who ordered me on no account to allow her to slip through my fingers, as Pope Alexander Borgia would give the eyes from his head to have her safe at Rome. Charles felt that while he held her as hostage he possessed the key to all his difficulties, and might demand as her ransom consent to the peaceable entry of the French forces into Rome.

"By my salvation!" I exclaimed, "I see not why that sink of iniquity, Borgia, should have any concern in the matter of the whereabouts of so lovely a lady as the Signorina Farnese."

"Then you can see no further beyond your nose than a new-born puppy," laughed Louis d' Ars, "since it is matter of common knowledge that Giulia Farnese is the mistress of the Pope."



CARIATIDES AT CAPRAROLA
From a photograph by Mr. Charles A. Platt

Mr. Tol

To that I answered never a word, but struck my friend and fell to the floor bereft of my senses.

When I came to myself Louis was supporting me in his arms as tenderly as a mother, his face, in spite of the trickle of blood from the uncared-for wound which I had given him, still beaming upon me with friendliness and concern.

"My poor boy," he said, "I would not have been so brutal had I known how it was with you, but, Yves, you must have known it in time, and the sooner the better, for it is true."

With that I embraced him, he agreeing to speak no more on that head, and he made me glad by returning the next morning to Viterbo, for I could not abear his presence.

I had much to settle with my own mind, and, as it will be understood, I avoided the casino in the upper garden, and paced the lower parterre in the bitter companionship of my own thoughts. There were certain uncouth giant statues here of heathen gods ¹ who

¹Yves d'Allegre cannot here refer to the giant Hermes which are such characteristic features of the garden of Caprarola, for it was not until the villa was remodelled by Vignola a half century later that this phalanx of sylvan deities mounted guard.

stared stonily down upon me as sternly inexorable as the arbiters of fate.

"What can you do, puny child?" they seemed to say, "you are but our plaything, one of the puppets of the gods; and if you have found that she whom you deemed a goddess is also only a puppet, manipulated by other wills and wires than yours, what can you do? What can you do but tear her from your heart and suffer her to dance her dance?"

And in that first fierce rage and grief I would have let her go, if I could, with scathing denunciation; but against my will, and hers, I must still hold her a prisoner. So, night after night, I paced the terrace alone, eating my own heart, stabbing myself with memories.

My betrothed must have guessed that I knew, for letters were brought me from her, which I returned unanswered and unopened. I must have it out with her in time, I knew, but I could frame no words as yet for this unutterable horror.

There was truce now between the Pope and King Charles, and one day his Eminence Cardinal Alessandro Farnese arrived at Caprarola with permission from King Charles to visit his sister and to take anything he would

from the villa saving and excepting her person.

We had few and curt words, and he passed through the wood to the plaisance. He made but a brief stay at the casino, leaving the Lady Giulia in my wardship with most unbrotherly alacrity; but taking with him on his return to Rome the same day many cart-loads of his choicest treasures. The maid Faustina also, for whose companionship he seemed more eager than for that of his sister, rode with him.

It dawned upon me, with the look of malicious triumph which she gave on mounting her palfrey, that she was possibly the cardinal's *bien aimée* and I loathed them both. A nest of evil things this fair villa of Caprarola had proved, and it grew hateful to me as though infected with some foul disease. But for all my abhorrence I could not tear the image of Giulia Farnese from my mind, and at times I could scarce restrain myself from rushing to her and pouring forth my reproaches and my scorn. Had I been a hot-blooded Italian I would have stabbed her and myself as well, but we northern natures, while suffering none the less, have more of self-control and can die in agony making no sign.

Then there came a time when I thought of

her sitting abashed and deserted even by her brother and all the bitterness died within me, leaving only a great pity. Who was I to judge her, not knowing in what devil's net of villainy she had been trapped? If I were only sure that she, loathing this hell, welcomed me as sent to rescue her from it, ah! then indeed I could forgive; and thinking so I remembered how she had striven to confess and I had stopped her mouth with kisses, and kneeling before the crucifix I vowed that if I saw her repentant, bowed with grief, my love should be great enough even for this. Scarcely had I come to this decision before I had word from King Charles that all was now arranged with the Pope, the French army would celebrate Christmas in Saint Peter's, and my occupation as gaoler was ended, for Giulia Farnese was free to go where she listed.

I sent her this message, and the first use she made of her freedom was to appear before me unannounced in the cardinal's library, which I had made my office.

As she stood there, beautiful as ever, with the same shy love-light in her eyes, a miracle was wrought within me. All the resentment and bitterness in my heart was overwhelmed

and drowned in the rush of the returning tide of my own intolerable love.

"Oh why have you come?" I cried. "Go, go to Rome without farewell, for I cannot bear to look upon you."

"But I am not going to Rome, Allegro," she said, "not if you will keep your promise to take me with you when you go back to Auvergne."

I was speechless with wonder at the audacity that could thus claim my promise made when I thought her innocent, and that I, knowing what I knew, could forget every consideration but my love for her. For here was no magdalen grovelling for my forgiveness, but a pure-eyed woman who recognised the anguish in my face with surprise and concern, nay, more, with a look which seemed to say, "What can trouble you, Allegro, since I love you?"

"I have been deceived," I cried, "but not by you. No false woman could look at me thus. It is I who must beg forgiveness that I have in thought wronged you for even an instant."

But she could not thus accept her happiness. "Nay, but I did deceive you, Allegro," she confessed, "or did you, dearest, see through our ruse from the first, recognising that I

was not Giulia Farnese, but a simple maid playing her part that so my mistress might escape to her own?"

And so they tricked me indeed and the profligate had escaped, leaving me a bride untitled and portionless but pure as the driven snow; and the trick mattered not after all, for Charles had made his terms with the Borgia while his mistress was still a hostage.

I owed the vile Pope a grudge, however, and repaid it in due time; but my thankfulness was so great that my darling's sin was not what I had fancied that I forgave it out of hand. We were married on Christmas Day, and she sits by my side as I write, in my old ancestral château, well content with her Allegro and not resentful that I wronged her once, since my love endured even that supreme test of all.



VIEW FROM THE TERRACE OF ISOLA BELLA, LAGO MAGGIORE



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CHAPTER VII

THE BORROMEIO TAPESTRIES

To that elaborate island were we bound,
Of yore the scene of Borromeoan pride,
Folly's prodigious work; where all around,
Under its coronet, and self belied,
Look where you will, you cannot choose but see
The obtrusive motto's proud Humility.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

ISLANDS of phantasmagoria, projected straight from the colour-saturated brain of some artist drunk with sunsets,—such the Borromeoan Isles seemed to John Hunt as he saw them rise before him that sultry June morning.

“It is all utterly impossible,” he said, turning to the travelling companion who joined him on the hotel veranda. “I cannot make this villa seem a part of our practical twentieth century. We have evidently drifted back into

some mythical period of romance as foreign from our own in feeling as it is in expression."

"Stage settings for a romantic opera," Mortimer Sherwood replied, as he lighted his cigar and leaned upon the balustrade. "Nature seem to be constantly striving for effect on the Italian lakes. Who was it compared their scenery to 'a long succession of glorified drop-curtains'? One tires very soon of this apparently artificial picturesqueness. It is all so perfectly composed, like a painting by one of the old landscapists. The hills slope away at the conventional angle, and there is always the white campanile as a bright note in the middle distance and the boat in the foreground giving just the required spot of colour. That particular one, by the way, is waiting for us, and you will find Isola Bella on closer acquaintance even more ridiculous. From this point the island resembles nothing so much as a highly decorated wedding-cake. Absurd, senseless style, the Baroque, is it not? with its barbarous over-ornamentation, at once preposterous and ponderous, like a winged elephant, or the impossible imaginings of some Teutonic writer of wonder stories."

But John Hunt found nothing to deride in

the old rococo palace, or incongruous in the grotesqueries of its garden architecture. It was not the first time that the tone of superior connoisseurship affected by Sherwood had offended him, and a nearer view of the villa elicited the opinion that where the surroundings were so melodramatic man was forced to be prodigal of every device to "keep step with nature."

"I had no intention of finding fault," he explained, "when I characterised this place as out of harmony with our modern era. People were different when this extravaganza was created. The race was younger, its passions and its imagination less controlled; no wonder its deeds and its dwellings seem incredible to us, for they would be alike impossible for men of our time."

With this protest Hunt wandered away from his carping acquaintance, exploring and enjoying the many surprises afforded by the fantastic old garden.

He took keen delight in its curious *arte topiaria* which travestied that of the sculptor and the architect, in the grotesque grotto,—built it would appear by some humorous giant as a playhouse for his children, in the coloured shell and pebble mosaic, in the concealed

fountains which sprayed him facetiously when his unwary foot passed a secret spring, and in the mutilated but jovial statues of fauns and dryads and other mythical deities and monsters.

More intensely still he enjoyed the glorious luxuriance of the semi-tropical vegetation;—giant heliotropes, magnolias, and tree ferns, *mille fleur* roses garlanding the cliff, and white and pink oleanders, bursting into rocket-like bouquets along the arcaded terrace; but more potent in its ministry of pleasure than all these factors was the ever present, ever varying prospect—the blue-green and silver expanse of Lago Maggiore mirroring its glorious setting of villa-clad hills and distant mountains.

There were but two drawbacks to his perfect happiness; Mortimer Sherwood's presence and the absence of Laura Harmon.

Instead of cavilling like his enforced companion she would have been thrilled by all this glamour of visual beauty and romantic suggestiveness, for she was an artist, and possessed not only the power to reproduce beauty, but what is quite as rare, the faculty of sympathetic appreciation.

Nothing was too good for Laura, and when she had told her lover of her overweening de-

sire to perfect herself in her chosen art, he had put aside his own longing, and, unknown to her, had endowed a fund for foreign study which, through the connivance of a professional friend, presently honoured Laura with a scholarship. Her happiness had been his meat and drink, though he had denied himself the sweet reward of her gratitude, well knowing that Laura's pride would not have allowed her to accept such a favour. But a boon greater than gratitude had been granted him, for, surprised by the pain of their parting, Laura had acknowledged that she loved him.

"It's all right, little girl," he had said, "go and have all you want of it; only, if art does not answer all your expectations, just cable for me and I shall join you by the fastest steamer next sailing after the receipt of that cablegram."

The foreign scholarship had handicapped him at a critical time, but through toilsome days and anxious nights he had never regretted it. For Hunt life had been an intensely exciting battle-field, in which he had never despaired, for he knew that he had provided for every possible emergency, and now that victory was assured his satisfaction with his own lot radiated to his surroundings, causing

them to glow with reflected glory. They were to be married in another month, and not all the seductions of Italy would have kept him from immediately joining Laura in Paris had she not in the last letter which he had received before leaving home requested him to pause *en route* from Genoa for a glimpse at the Italian lakes. She had given as a reason for this delay the hope that he might find some secluded villa in which they could pass their honeymoon, and Hunt's heart ached with envy at this moment that he could not procure for her this palace of the Borromei.

Something of this Mortimer Sherwood knew, for the two men had been college classmates, and at that time he had known Laura Harmon more intimately than Hunt. Chance had just made them fellow-travellers, and in the pleasure and expansion of their unexpected meeting Hunt had forgotten how little they had really known each other, and had confided more of his present happiness and future hopes than was perhaps advisable. He had a lurking suspicion that his enthusiasms furnished mild amusement to Sherwood, who though but a few months his actual senior was centuries older in the kind of experience which takes away belief in native goodness, un-

selfishness, the power to resist temptation, and all that makes for the worth and joy of life. Antagonism awoke within Hunt after each of Sherwood's innuendoes. "I refuse to be influenced by you" he said to himself. "You shall not take the sun out of my sky, nor spoil my enjoyment of this delightful old villa,—not one little bit."

So, the more Sherwood discoursed of the faults of Isola Bella the more John Hunt smiled incredulously, finding it adorable for the very reasons cited.

- "Can't you see, Mortimer," he asked, "how it's all of a piece with the history of the family? Over there at Angera is the grim old castle of the earlier Borromeos, who, according to the legend, were children of hell, while here we have a paradise, a fitting home for San Carlo Borromeo, who belonged, they say, to heaven. Granted that the place is extraordinary, it ought to be: with saints and devils for actors one would expect the *mise en scène* to be a little out of the common."

During the ocean-passage Hunt had beguiled the unwontedly idle days by an orgy of reading, furbishing up his rusty knowledge of Italian history with the praiseworthy intention of preparing himself for his privileges.

If he could not controvert Sherwood's artistic theories he could at least hold his ground in this field, for the deeds of the good and bad Borromeos had alike captivated his imagination. The events narrated seemed to him so surprising that he had been inclined to look upon them as mythical, until at Isola Bella he had found many of them confirmed, and was even shown the very bed on which the good Saint Carlo had died of the plague. The swing of the pendulum from previous doubt made him the more credulous now, and he readily believed the guide's assurance that it had been stripped of its hangings at the time of the cardinal's death, for proofs of this assertion seemed to be afforded by the shreds of tapestry still depending from the rings from which the infected curtains had been so hastily torn.

It was good, standing in this stately chamber, to forget the present century and to review the life of that martyr-hero. Hunt remembered how the ambition of Carlo Borromeo's life had been to leave to his episcopal see of Milan a worthy cathedral. To this end he had consecrated his fortune and his influence until at length he had gathered a sufficient sum for the immense undertaking. The plans, by



VILLA BORROMEO, ISOLA BELLA

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the most skilful architect of the day, had been elaborated from his own design in the last flowering of Italian Gothic, for he possessed intense love for architecture and much artistic ability. The corner-stone was laid and the beautiful building shot upward with magical rapidity until in 1577 Carlo Borromeo consecrated the unfinished building and asked of God but one more boon, that he might be allowed to chant the "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" in the completed minster.

Then, just as it seemed possible that it might be finished in his lifetime, the Black Death descended upon Milan and his parishioners died like flies on the burning pavements. The city was illy prepared for the scourge. It lacked hospitals and nurses and the most ordinary sanitation. The conscientious archbishop took shame for his neglect and, calling a meeting of the cathedral chapter, himself proposed a diversion of the fund from the purpose he had so much at heart to the more immediate necessities of Milan. Hastily buildings were equipped and the monks instructed and organised into a corps of nurses, and daily the archbishop drove with them through the infected streets, collecting the pest-stricken

wretches, and with his own hands ministering to their needs. So he laboured unremittingly until the plague was stayed. Then, its last victim, Carlo Borromeo himself yielded up his gentle spirit never seeing, except in vision, the myriad-statued pinnacles of his passionately desired cathedral.

All this Hunt remembered as he stood by the great, bare bedstead, with the good man's motto, "Humility," emblazoned beneath the archiepiscopal mitre, an insignia which San Carlo always preferred to his later honour the cardinal's hat, because it implied more strenuous duties. And the indignation of the young American rose as Sherwood scoffed:

"For my part, I cannot credit the abnormal goodness of that tiresome old saint. Human nature, I fancy, is very much the same throughout the ages; and from my limited study of its manifestations in the present day I can much more readily believe in the deviltries of other members of the Borromeo family. They say that the pest came to Milan through the revenge of one of the Borromei. Feigning reconciliation he entertained an enemy in an infected villa, and allowed him to return to the city to spread the contagion."

"If that is true," Hunt replied, "it only proves my contention that men were differently constituted in that early age. Conscience, except in such rare natures as Carlo Borromeo, was in its germ; men lived frankly physical lives, with the moral side of their being only imperfectly developed. No man at the present day in his normal senses could commit the fiendish deeds that one reads of in early Italian history. They almost convince me of the possibility of demoniacal possession, an explanation which I presume you would hardly be willing to admit."

"You are partly right and partly wrong in your deductions," Sherwood replied; "all wrong when you read history as though it were a collection of fictitious tales composed for your entertainment, or look at those old brigands as irresponsible puppets in dramas which they themselves did not take seriously; wrong too when you plume yourself on your superiority to them. I fancy they had intuitions of right and wrong which were quite as correct as our own; but they lived more intensely, life was terribly real to them, and public opinion had not made them hypocrites. If you cannot put yourself in their places and see yourself committing the very acts which we

now consider crimes, you are deficient in imaginative sympathy.

"But I believe you to have hit upon a truth more universal in its application than you perhaps realize when you suggest that the authors of some of these monstrous deeds may have been possessed of the devil. We have all of us latent passions held in check by education, and when these artificial barriers are unfelt, as in the hypnotic state, even a man with your moral principles might respond to the suggestion of a stronger mind and so commit a crime."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Hunt, exasperated beyond endurance. "I defy any one to so act upon my will as to make me perform any deed which in my normal senses I would consider criminal or 'even dishonourable.'"

"Be careful," replied Sherwood. "I have some little hypnotic power, and your challenge would interest me to exert it were it not that I hesitate to assume the responsibility for your subsequent deeds."

"I thank you, Sherwood, for your consideration," Hunt replied, "but I absolve you from any such responsibility. I am a free moral agent and a man with a tolerably strong will; moreover since you have warned me of your

intentions I shall be on my guard against you."

Sherwood's face darkened. "You are the most unendurably self-assured creature I have ever met. I honestly believe that it would do you good to commit a sin for which you could be wholesomely ashamed. I therefore undertake your case, and am so sure of success that I promise in case of failure within one month of date to send your bride a wedding gift to the value of a thousand dollars."

Hunt was startled and regarded his companion keenly for a moment before he asked: "Who do you propose shall decide the question?"

"You shall be your own judge," replied the other, "and I confidently expect to receive from you shortly some object of equal value in admission that you have lost your wager."

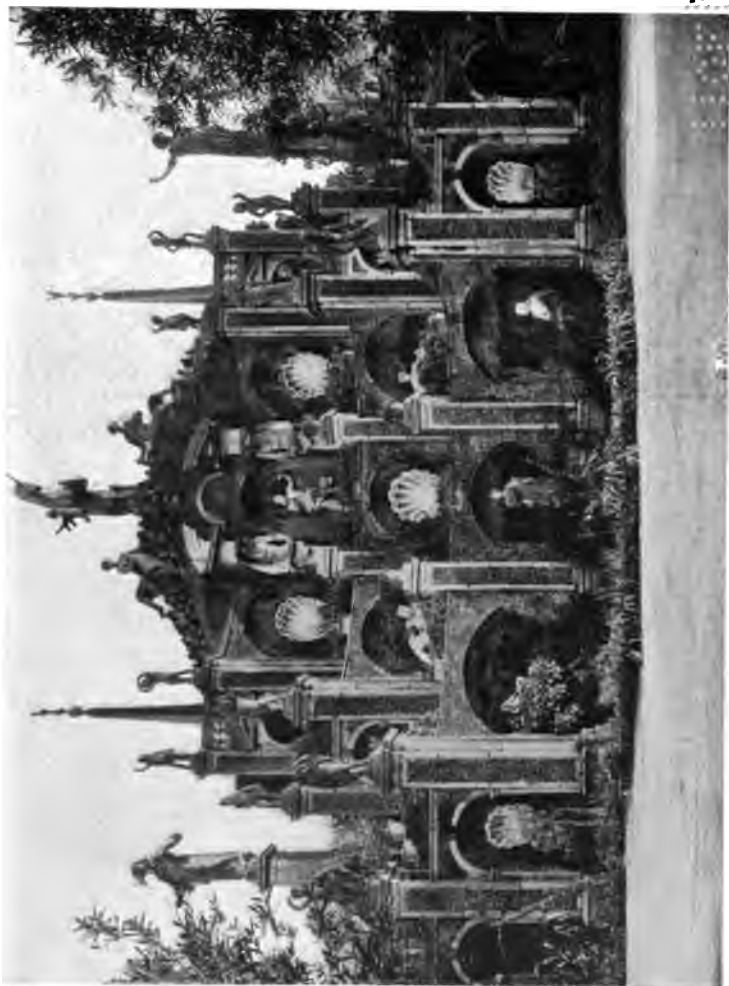
Hunt smiled grimly. "This may be a little joke on your part, Mortimer, and if so, I have no intention of extorting a gift from you for my wife; but whatever you may mean I propose she shall have an honourable man for a husband. I have on a certain memorably unique occasion been very drunk. I have been crazy with fever. I took hasheesh in my college days by way of experiment, but neither in

my sane nor delirious moments have I ever done anything disgraceful."

"You might be less blatantly and insufferably self-righteous if you had," retorted Sherwood; "you need a little humbling, my boy, and henceforward I shall have no remorse. A reproving conscience is not a comfortable possession, but it teaches us charity to others' failings and it is all you require to make you a very good fellow."

Hunt, thoroughly nettled, turned abruptly on his heel and mounted the long succession of terraces; but all the beauty seemed to have gone out of the entrancing view. The white villas sparkled still on the hillside of Stresa embowered in olive and orange groves, and he endeavoured to shake off the change of mood which suddenly oppressed him. Surely somewhere on that sunny hill-slope he could find the bower which he sought for Laura. Sherwood's threat was puerile; no man so blessed as he could be tempted to wickedness.

Laura's delicate sense of right and wrong had been his conscience, to live up to her estimate of him his ambition. He felt himself secure in her love. He would take another look at the grotto which had seemed to him so mirth-inspiring, and leave Isola Bella, as it



BAROQUE GROTTO, ISOLA BELLA

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were, with a pleasant taste in his mouth. To his surprise the hilarious river-gods, mischievous nymphs, and playful *putti*, piled tier upon tier in their green niches and presided over by an absurdly prancing equine monster, no longer seemed amusing, but on the contrary pompous and irritating.

"Am I losing my sense of humour?" he asked himself, "and becoming a hypercritical kill-joy like Sherwood? I wonder whether Italian cookery disagrees with me, or is it the heat that has given me a headache? I will go back to the hotel and take a siesta, after the manner of the country, and then the night train for Paris. Laura shall help me find our villa. I cannot stay away from her any longer."

But at the hotel he found a telegram:

"Do not come to Paris at present. Letter waiting you at Hotel Metropole, Milan, will explain.
LAURA."

What could it mean? He was loth to turn southward, but apparently it was the only way to understand the situation. Why was Laura continually putting him off? He told himself that he had perfect faith in her, that he could never be jealous or distrustful, and he remembered that a year ago, when she had asked for

more time, he had written confidently: "As much time as you want, dearest: since I am sure of your love I can wait a century."

But now he was all impatience and it hurt him that Laura should so delay their meeting.

Mortimer Sherwood joined him at dinner and apologies were exchanged over a bottle of Asti. "I am afraid I was disgustingly self-satisfied," Hunt admitted, "but you see I am so happy as I am, that I can't imagine a motive strong enough to make me exert myself to do anything out of the common."

"That is it," replied Sherwood, "you are most exasperatingly blissful. That was what provoked me. I have always held the reverse of the time-hallowed maxim,—'Be good and you will be happy.' You are happy and of course you are good, and can have no conception of the state of mind which drives a man to murder. I suppose you are off to-night to Paris. I must bid you good-bye, for I go to Milan to-morrow, though I shall follow you the day after."

"Milan!" exclaimed Hunt as though the idea had but just occurred to him,—"I don't mind running down with you. I would like to take a look at the cathedral, which was built after the plans of Carlo Borromeo though

he never had the satisfaction of seeing it completed."

"It is well worth the slight divergence," said Sherwood, regarding his friend quizzically as he fingered his cigarette. "You will only lose a few hours if you take the Paris express with me on Thursday."

But Hunt found no letter from Laura awaiting him at the Metropole and when Sherwood left the next day it had not yet arrived. He soon exhausted the cathedral and other attractions of the city, and divided his time between wandering aimlessly about the streets and inditing reproachful letters to Laura. The evening of his arrival in Milan he had been approached by a dealer in antiques who had not ceased to importune him each morning as he issued from his hotel. Hunt was repulsing him for the third time when the irrepressible little man presented a list of the specialties of the "Maison Zocchi" and Hunt's eye was caught by the name Borromeo. Perceiving his advantage Zocchi begged the illustrious gentleman to grant him the honour of showing him certain inestimable treasures of art which had once belonged to the sainted Carlo Borromeo.

"What are they?" Hunt asked.

"Tapestries, your Excellency, the most valuable and beautiful that can be conceived, bearing the device of the family with a mitre and crozier. Incontestably as genuine as the relics shown in the Duomo."

"I am not purchasing tapestries," Hunt replied shortly.

"But these are not for sale, Most Illustrious. They were purchased a few days since by the American gentleman who came to Milan with the Signor. He promised to call again with the check and then to give me the address to which I am to send them, but he must have been called away suddenly. The Signor does not by chance know where I can write him? It does not matter. Doubtless he will notify me concerning them, and meantime if the Most Illustrious would deign to regard them he will find himself fully repaid for the slight exertion."

"I will go with you," Hunt replied, and he followed his guide through the oldest and most squalid streets of the city to the quarter of the artisans. Here workmen overflowing their cell-like shops obstructed the narrow sidewalks, pursuing their vocations in the open air; soldering and pounding metal, reupholstering chairs, gilding pictures frames, var-

nishing and restoring old altar-pieces, and otherwise furbishing up antique objects.

After threading a tunnel-like passage debouching into a court-yard Zocchi led Hunt up a rickety staircase into a rear room piled with bales of tapestries, the centre of the floor filled by a large one in the last stages of dilapidation, upon which several women were at work, industriously darning and filling in the holes with other tattered fragments.

"Illustrious sees for himself," said the voracious Zocchi, "that I manufacture only veritable antics. Oh, multo antic, and its genuinity not open to discussion."

"Is *that* rag your Borromean masterpiece?" Hunt asked scornfully.

"Most assuredly not," replied the other as he triumphantly threw open a door—"Enter, Illustrious, and behold!"

The room, small and unventilated, was rendered still more stifling by the fumes of some drug smouldering in a brazier, but John Hunt scarcely noticed this at first, for his attention was instantly caught by the beauty and remarkable freshness of the five pieces stretched upon frames in the centre of the room. They were of small size, for they had once composed a baldachin or canopy for a state bed.

The well-known Borromeo arms were embroidered on the largest and Hunt was struck by the phenomenal vividness of the colours and the fineness of the weaving and general perfect condition of the set of draperies. Only the tarnished bullion fringe showed the discoloration of age, and except for several rents along the upper edges there were no worn, ragged or soiled places to indicate that they had ever been used or holes made by moths or mice.

Hunt pointed out this peculiarity to the dealer as throwing some doubt upon their vaunted "genuinity," whereupon Zocchi confessed in confidence that there were peculiar circumstances connected with these tapestries. They were unfaded because they had very seldom been exposed to the light since taken from the bed upon which San Carlo died, but had been preserved as sacred relics by the brotherhood of the Misericordia, to whom they had been given for their services in nursing him during his last moments.

"But Carlo Borromeo died of the plague!" Hunt exclaimed, "and all of his bed clothing was very properly burned. I was told this at the villa of Isola Bella, where I was shown his bedstead." As he spoke his face blanched, for he noted that the intervals between the rents

on the upper selvages of the curtains corresponded in number (as nearly as he could remember) to the rings from which he had been assured the authentic hangings had been torn. It was only circumstantial evidence, but it was appallingly conclusive and he scarcely heard Zocchi's explanation.

"Ah! Most Illustrious, such was doubtless the report given out. But how could anything which had touched his holy body be infected? The hospital monks kept these tapestries in a chest of camphor wood, which was never opened except for a miracle, for when all other means of healing failed, if these draperies were laid upon the sick they were immediately translated to Paradise or else arose and walked."

"I am not surprised," Hunt replied, "if the afflicted knew what manner of coverlet touched them. I also will arise and walk, for I have no wish to submit myself as a candidate for their miraculous powers. And Hunt, hurrying past the workmen and down the staircase, only paused to take breath in the outer court. "I shall report you to the Board of Health if there is such a thing in this God-forsaken town," he said indignantly to Zocchi, when the latter joined him.

"The Most Illustrious may spare himself the trouble. I bought the tapestries at a sale of confiscated articles when the religious orders were dispersed, a sale naturally authorised by the city government since the proceeds went into its treasury. Moreover I have carefully disinfected the tapestries by burning the most efficacious drugs recommended in this little manual written by a learned physician at the time of that identical plague."

Hunt heard no more, for he was striding angrily to his hotel. "What could have induced Sherwood to purchase those cursed tapestries?" he asked himself, and though he had no love for his former comrade he wrote him on his return to his hotel warning him of his danger. So excited was he that not until he had written Sherwood's name upon the envelope did he realise that he was ignorant of the proper address. As he sat staring at the letter the hotel clerk approached with joyous alacrity. Hunt had so frequently asked for his mail only to be met with profuse apologies (as though his disappointment were a matter for which the house were responsible), that this well-meaning individual beamed with happiness as he announced:

"The letter which the Signor so impatien-

ta attenda have instantly make herself to arrive."

The address was in Sherwood's handwriting and a premonition of evil thrilled through Hunt's mind before he broke the seal. It contained two engraved cards:

Mrs. E. L. Harmon
announces the marriage of her daughter
Laura
to
Mortimer Sherwood,
At the residence of the American Ambassador,
Paris, June 31st.

Mr. and Mrs. Mortimer Sherwood at home
July 14th and 30th, Villa Bellevue,
Montmorenci.

This was all, but as John Hunt sat staring at the cards, shreds and scraps of memories of Sherwood's rumoured attentions to Laura, before his own acquaintance with her, fitted in with certain enigmatic remarks and mysterious smiles with which his comrade had exasperated him upon the voyage, and the devil took possession of him.

He wandered for hours through the glaring streets of Milan chattering to himself like a madman, until his aimless tramping brought him again to the street of the artisans, and

there was Zocchi, hat in hand, inquiring in what way he could serve the Most Illustrious.

The wedding announcement was still in John Hunt's hand, and showing it to the dealer he said in a voice which no one could have recognised as his own: "Here is the address for which you asked. You may send the tapestries at once and enclose a receipted bill, for I will pay for them."

Zocchi understood the import of the cards and grinned as he replied: The Illustrious is munificent; the tapestries are exactly what his friend desired and will make a superb wedding present."

"They are not a gift," Hunt retorted, "simply the payment of a bet," and reeling as he spoke he fell unconscious. The physicians at first pronounced the case sunstroke, but as several days passed and the delirium of their patient continued they shook their heads and said, "Brain fever." "Has he no friends to be notified?" they asked and searching his effects found a packet of Laura's letters.

A telegram brought her, and for days she nursed him tenderly while his life hung in the balance. At last there came a day when he was conscious. The look of infinite blessed-

ness which glorified his face on recognising her was clouded presently.

"You escaped the contagion?" he asked, "you have not been ill?"

"No, dearest, it is you who have been sick."

"And he, is he dead?"

"Who, darling?"

"Your husband," he replied and turned away his face.

"I have no husband yet, dear, but I hope to have one soon if you are very quiet and obey the doctor's orders. Do not excite yourself, for all that you have raved about in your fever, my marriage and your own crime, has no real existence."

"Then I am not, not a murderer, and you were not untrue. That was all a dream?"

"All a dream, dear John."

"Thank God!" he said and closed his eyes as weakly and obediently as a little child. But as he grew stronger, reason reasserted itself and memories drifted in upon him.

"Tell me all the truth, Laura," he begged. "I am strong enough to bear it, now that I know that the announcement of your marriage to Mortimer Sherwood was false. How was it that he escaped the contagion of the tapestries?"

"I have not seen Mortimer Sherwood for years," she replied, "but a set of tapestries was sent to my studio just before the physicians summoned me to you."

"You did not unpack them?" he cried in an agony of suspense.

"Why, certainly, and just within the cover there was this letter for you, in my care——"

"From Sherwood, curse him," Hunt cried, but the imprecation died upon his lips and a blush of shame crimsoned his face as he read—

"MY DEAR HUNT:

"You are either an impossible saint or a much shrewder man than I thought you, and in either case I confess myself beaten.

"Your confidence in the unalterable fidelity of your fiancée is as creditable to her as your contempt of my ability to affect it is uncomplimentary to me.

"Or did the first glance at the date of the fraudulent announcement expose my trick?

"Of course you understand that the cards sent you were the only ones struck off, and that the plates were immediately destroyed. I confess that I did hope that you would not immediately see through the deception, and that in your *mauvais quart d'heure* you might be surprised into exhibiting enough anger to

prove that we are none of us so perfect but (given sufficient provocation) the other thing is possible.

“My pretended possession of hypnotic power was a part of my scheme, for I argued that you might imagine yourself under my influence and so released from responsibility for your actions.

“Failing in my benevolent intention of thus convincing you that those early Italians with their hot passions were really not so very different in their makeup from ourselves,—I trusted that you would at least show some natural indignation at the unpardonable liberty taken in perpetrating such a practical joke. You can therefore imagine my disgust when you heaped coals of fire on my unworthy head by sending me your friendly warning in regard to the tapestries. It was incredibly magnanimous, my dear Hunt, but it was also quite unnecessary (except as a corrective of my pessimistic views of human nature), for the tapestries are base imitations, of transparently modern manufacture. You will find the address of the maker woven in the border, and if you visit his factory will see this particular design repeated *ad infinitum*.

“As Zocchi has sent them just in time and

they are perfectly innocuous, and may remind you of the Borromean saint and villa in which you took so romantic an interest, I make them my promised wedding-gift to your bride, with my heartiest congratulations.

“Your misguided but well-intentioned

“MORTIMER SHERWOOD.”

“By the way, there was a pretty villa half-way up the hill at Stressa, Villa Paradiso in gilt letters on the gate, with fine view of the Borromean Islands. It struck me as just the thing. I hope it is still unrented.”

It was not until long afterward that John Hunt realised what an exceedingly good business transaction that astute rogue Zocchi had made of the tapestries, receiving payment for their double sale from himself and from Sherwood as well; or understood that he owed Sherwood's good opinion, based on the receipt of his warning letter, to the happy chance of the hotel clerk's finding it the first day after Hunt had been taken ill and completing the address from one left at the hotel by Sherwood himself.

These minor considerations were forgotten, obliterated in the humiliation which he experienced in realising that he had actually committed a crime identical with that of the

mythical Borromeo who brought the plague to Milan, and but for God's providence, not his rival alone but Laura as well and thousands of persons as innocent might have perished as victims of his diabolical revenge.



CHAPTER VIII

THE REAL THING

What name was that the little girl sang forth?
Kate? The Cornaro, doubtless, who renounced
The crown of Cyprus to be lady here,
At Asolo, where still her memory stays.

ROBERT BROWNING.

NOTHING is more irresistible than a formal garden gone wild, a plaisance, where art has done its utmost, neglected for centuries until nature has swept in, reconquered her domain, and taken it to her heart.

This was Robert Allen's feeling as he left his motor-car at the entrance gate and strolled through the overgrown avenues of the Villa of Asolo. All day long he had been climbing the dusty highway with the intolerable sunshine flashing in his eyes. The shade from the unclipped trees and shrubbery was like a bath

of greenness, and he welcomed gratefully the refreshing sound of rippling water and the pungent scent of box.

The abundant marbles, mottled by moss, caressed by vines, and flecked by the waving shadows of foliage had been mellowed to such low tones that they seemed a more natural outcrop of the soil than the freshly exposed quarries of Carrara which glistened like snow-drifts in the clefts of the neighbouring mountains. And of what material other than marble should the terrace steps of this enchanted garden be constructed when the very roads down which the oxen drag the great blocks are paved with its dust?

Robert Allen had saturated his imagination with the story of the royal lady who so long ago held her mimic court at Asolo, and the scene which now opened before him was like the setting for a play with whose book he was already familiar. As a sense of the realisation of a long cherished ideal grew upon him he drew a deep breath of satisfaction, all the enthusiasm of a sensitive but restrained nature voicing itself in his exclamation: "Yes, this *is* the real thing!"

With increasing delight he wandered from point to point, taking in the wonderful pano-

rama—Venice, Vicenza, Padua, plainly visible on the horizon's rim—and recognising on every hand localities made familiar through his reading.

Here, opening to the garden was the stately hall with the double pillared loggia where Cardinal Bembo organised his "Court of Love" for the wedding festivities of the Queen's maid of honour, the beautiful Fiammetta.

Allen regretted that he had not brought with him a copy of the gay Cardinal's little drama, for he would have enjoyed rereading it upon the very spot where it was composed and acted.

Where was the fountain with the curving exedra where an audience listened to Perrotino's indictment of Cupid to Gismondo's grave defence, and to Larinello's judicial summing up of the arguments?

He would recognise it, of that he was certain, for Bembo's description had the perfectness of detail of one of Carpaccio's canvasses. Moreover he had reliable data in regard to this focal feature in the idyllic garden masque, for he had lately seen a reproduction of the fountain executed by a young Venetian sculptor.

His sister, who had shared his study of Italian history, had discovered the copy of the Asolo fountain and had requested him to purchase it for their country home in America.

But to her surprise and displeasure Robert Allen had flatly refused.

"If there is one thing that I am determined upon," he announced, "it is that at Glen Allen there shall be no pretence or imitation. In my home and in my life I want only the real thing."

"But Robert," Margaret Allen had remonstrated, "a copy which is frankly a copy is not a forgery, and when the original is unattainable——"

"It happens, my dear sister, that in the present instance the original is not unattainable. I leave for Asolo to-morrow with a reputable dealer in antiques, who assures me that he can manage the transaction for me. You can trust me not to be deceived by a forgery or inveigled into purchasing a worthless piece of dilapidation, and you need know no more until I return triumphant, as I hope, but if not then the least said the better."

Arrived at Asolo as neither had any precise knowledge as to the location of the fountain, the dealer and Allen had agreed to explore

the garden in different directions, Allen choosing the mountain slope. At his side a runnel of water, not dashing freely over rocks but confined to a carved conduit and falling from basin to basin babbled merrily suggesting the prattle of children. So, he remembered, the brook at Glen Allen sang as he waded it in his boyhood. The long shadows which dappled his path quivered joyously, filling his heart with a buoyant expectation, a prescience of happiness such as he had not experienced in many a year.

"I am on the right trail," he said to himself. "If these obstructing branches would only permit I should see my fountain from the end of this *allée*."

Suddenly the boughs swung open before him like gates, revealing, not the object of his search, though it was there, but a vision unexpected in this lonely place—the flash of sunlight upon fluttering feminine drapery. A lady startled by his footsteps had risen from the marble bench and stood "on tiptoe for a flight," under an archway of blossoming shrubs which opened into a side *allée*. As she lingered for an instant looking backward to ascertain who the intruder might be, Allen had a glimpse of rippling dark hair shading

darker eyes, a mischievous mouth and a sensuous chin carried proudly by a patrician throat. Then the figure, an unusually graceful one, vanished, and there was only a rain of blossoms from the shaken branches to tell that the empty niche of greenery had enshrined a statue.

Yes, there was another evidence of the recent presence: on the ground in front of the exedra where she dropped it lay the book which she had been reading, Bembo's *Gli Asolani*!

Allen noted the title with pleasure, and as paper and pencil slipped from its leaves he saw with surprise that the lady had been occupied in translating one of the sonnets into English.

A kindred interest in the poem so wrought with the glamour of the spot and with a sudden compelling desire to know more of this fair lady that Allen threw himself upon the sun-warmed bench and unscrupulously read the attempt at versification.

The work was that of an amateur, showing feeling but lack of skill, and, recalling the admirable translation of Horatio Brown, he wrote rapidly upon the lady's tablet the lines beginning:

A maid I lived in mirth and jocund air;
Sweet fancies fed me, with my lot content.

This completed, his boldness increasing with his enthusiasm, he added the companion sonnet in which Fiammetta answers Mona Berenice's arraignment of Cupid:

A maid I lived in dolour and distress,
With comrades wroth, with my own self in rage;
Now Love with such sweet thoughts doth me
assuage
What can I else but sing for mirthfulness?

These literary recreations were suddenly interrupted by a distant halloo, and Allen sprang to his feet guiltily secreting the volume in his pocket. He had forgotten his travelling companion, an uncongenial and somewhat vulgar man, to whom he had no intention of confiding this adventure. The man came crashing through the shrubbery wiping the beads of perspiration from his rubicund face.

"Why did n't you let me know that you had found the object of your search?" he asked querulously.

"Who do you mean?" Allen stammered.

"There is no one here."

"What do I mean? Why the fountain of



THE FOUNTAIN OF LOVE

From the *Chant du Soir* of Jacques Wagrez. With permission of Ad. Braun & Co.

May

course. You cannot expect me to believe that you do not recognise your fountain?"

"Yes, of course," Allen replied, "this is unmistakably the original of the one my sister desired me to purchase, and I must admit that the copy was surprisingly faithful."

"But how much more satisfactory," the other rejoined in evident alarm, "to possess an authentic antique. I am not a man of sentiment, but if I were the thought of the romantic history of this particular gem of art from the time that it was the rendezvous for the flirtations of Caterina's frisky maids up to this present, would certainly warm the cockles of my heart and give an additional charm to the fountain's picturesqueness. It *is* picturesque that you must admit. I thought so, well what do you say, is it a bargain?"

As Robert Allen regarded the fountain he thrilled with pardonable exultation, for he realised that his quest was justified. Angelo's copy had been painstakingly faithful, but it was too new, too perfect an article of commerce; whereas the original, through long habitation of this spot, had taken root and blossomed. Birds built upon its base, replying to the singing water with liquid twitterings; lizards basked upon its rim and had made

homes in its crevices. In short its appearance entirely comported with its associations, and Robert Allen replied unhesitatingly:

"It is a bargain, and I take it at your own valuation."

"Very good," the dealer replied gaily, "and since there is nothing further to detain us here, we will adjourn to the nearest inn, rest from our exertions, and order dinner."

Allen allowed himself to be led reluctantly away, but with no intention of immediately leaving Asolo. Mendaciously explaining that he had decided to continue his trip in the direction of the Tyrol he saw his undesired comrade depart by rail to Venice and hastened back to the villa.

The book which he had purloined to avoid betraying his chance encounter burned in his pocket. He told himself that he was bound in honour to return it, and he informed the gate-keeper that he wished to sketch in the garden, a small gratuity converting that Cerberus into his devoted slave.

"The Signor may make herself contenta," so the custodian assured him. "No man coma in giardino excepta ze Signorina."

"The Signorina?"

"Yas, ze Signorina di Floriano. Zat spotta

blanca on ze montagna,—Villa Floriano. Ze terra vicina, what you call neighbora. One leetle porta in ze muro. Ze Signorina taka mucha contenta passeggiare himself in ze giardino. Verra richa bella donna ze Signorina.”

Allen feigned indifference, and, loitering until the shrubbery hid him from view, hastened with nervous step toward the fountain.

The spot was apparently deserted, though it had seemed to him as he approached that he had heard the light tinkle of a mandolin, and presently he noticed with a comprehending smile a shred of silken fringe shut in the door of a tool house near the fountain. She was there, in hiding, and knowing that she had trapped herself Allen sat him down and much amused waited further developments. She could see him from her retreat, for the upper part of the door was an iron grille, and he lit a cigar and feigned absorption in the book. But, as the minutes passed by and she made no sign, he repented keeping her a prisoner, and depositing the book where he had found it, strolled leisurely out of sight. He could not, however, prevail upon himself to leave the neighbourhood, and presently he was startled by a frantic pounding in the direction of the tool house. The door had no handle

upon the inside, and the refugee had made herself a prisoner. She was raining ineffectual blows with some heavy implement, and soon an appealing cry for help brought Allen to her relief.

But she held her head high as she emerged, her cheeks flushing with more than the unwonted exercise, and was about to pass him without a word when Allen barred the way as he presented the borrowed volume.

She glanced swiftly through the translations which he had left within the cover, and as she read she grew every moment more manifestly indignant.

"So," she exclaimed, "you not only purloined my book but have taken the liberty to read my private papers!"

"It was unpardonable," he murmured, adding profuse but unintelligible apologies, and blushing in his turn while she scrutinised him unmercifully. "And where is my sonnet?" she asked suddenly, "how dared you keep it?"

"I did not intend to do so," he protested, "if it is not there I will bring it to your house this afternoon."

"Certainly not," she replied, "since I do not know you."

"Then I will send it."

"No, bring it here, at five this afternoon," she commanded, and so passed on with the bearing of an angry Juno.

"It is like my luck," Allen thought ruefully. "I shall never see her again, and shall probably be met this afternoon by some sour old servitor commissioned to receive the sonnet, if not by some irate male relative prepared to chastise me."

So naively hopeless was he of any possible rendezvous granted in this equivocal way that he was most agreeably surprised when the Signorina di Floriano herself kept the appointment.

He expressed his pleasure perhaps too effusively, for she frowned as she replied:

"You forget that I was compelled to come personally."

"How so?" he asked surprised.

"The poem which you have just given back to me is a confession of love written in my own hand. Imagine what a scandal it might have created if received from you by an indiscreet messenger; and in whose faithfulness can one trust?"

He stared blankly, for this misconception had not occurred to him, and then laughed boyishly. "How absurd," he exclaimed.

"Well, for once I am grateful for the senseless artificiality of social relations in this country; since to avoid the appearance of unconventionality you have given me another opportunity of telling you how sorry I am to have offended you."

Something in his evident embarrassment if not contrition restored the lady's good humour. This was not the sort of man which his astonishing presumption had led her to expect.

She laughed lightly. "I believe you meant me no humiliation," she said, "but can't you see how unpardonable it was in you to better my poor translation?"

"But the translation is not mine," he exclaimed eagerly. "Did I forget to quote it? Your verses were far superior to anything which I could have written."

After this clearing of the atmosphere they drifted naturally into chat suggested by the associations of the spot and the delightful literary coquetry that it had witnessed.

"It was not all Platonic love in Queen Caterina's time I fear," said the Signorina di Floriano, "for you will remember that the occasion which brought the witty company together was the wedding of the Queen's maid

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of honour, Fiammetta, for whom I was named and from whom I am descended."

"Ah! that explains your interest in Bembo's poem."

"But what is the explanation of yours?" she asked. "So few Americans care for Italian history or literature."

"Nor do I in the abstract. It was simply a personal sympathy for Caterina Cornaro, widowed at nineteen and despoiled by Venice of her kingdom of Cyprus for which she had fought so pluckily."

"Oh, but she was Venetian, and when her son died there was nothing left to fight for. She was only too glad to give Cyprus to Italy, to her country. And Venice was grateful. The Signory made this lovely spot a veritable kingdom, more delightful and less dangerous than the lonely island which in reality had been for her only a place of banishment. They treated her while she lived at Asolo, like a queen and she was buried with regal honours. She is not to be pitied for she knew that she would live in history as one who had served Italy.

"She was apparently happy here," Allen assented, "and might well have been for I never saw a place which so completely realised

my expectations. I wish I had brought my camera.

"I will lend you mine," she said with unexpected kindness. "I have taken many photographs in this garden which I will show you this evening if you care to call and can endure my father's monologues on our family portraits."

Robert Allen eagerly availed himself of the proffered privilege.

The Signor Floriano was a decrepit dilettante; but Allen listened patiently to his disquisitions on early Italian art for the sake of the exceeding recompense of Fiammetta's presence. It was interesting, too, to find her incarnated in certain of the old portraits, especially in one of Lotto's of which her father believed that the *Bride and Bridegroom* in the Madrid Gallery was only a replica.

"This," he said positively, "is the portrait of Florian di Floriano and his wife Fiammetta, lady in waiting to Caterina Cornaro. It was painted at the period of their marriage for whose festival Bembo wrote his fantasia *Gli Asolani*. I have every proof of this, and the types as you see are reproduced with fidelity in every generation. Our men have always had that honest and somewhat stolid look, our



CATERINA CORNARO
Titian

May

women are more clever—note my daughter's countenance. They have the same penetrating eyes that search us to the marrow of the soul, and the thin serious lips whose rare smile illuminates and transforms their faces."

Allen lingered on at Asolo, and in his walks with Fiammetta in the enchanted garden Love, as in Lotto's painting, fluttered above them linking them with his easy yoke.

He told her of his strenuous life and ambitions in America, and she listened with suppressed enthusiasm. "Ah! that is the life for a man. Here everything is finished, and there is nothing to do but to admire the achievements of others."

"But we are very raw and new," he added. "Let me give an instance which will explain what I mean. I own an estate in the Catskills, as beautiful naturally as this; but it lacks the touch of art, and until now this lack has never troubled me. My sister has made what she calls a garden. There is an abundance of flowers but no plan,—only a long, straight path with beds on either hand. This path exercises an attraction on every one who enters the garden. No one fails to ask to what it leads. It leads precisely nowhere, for it stops abruptly at a ravine between two

heavily wooded hills, the Glen for which the place was named. I can remember that there was a brook there in my boyhood, but its bed is dry, for the water has been diverted to a neighbouring mill. The ravine is an impenetrable tangle ending at a high stone wall.

"Recently in Venice my sister came across a reproduction of Caterina Cornaro's fountain, the very one where we first met as it strangely happens. She was interested in it because we had read together Bembo's poem and it was the cause of my coming to Asolo, for I wanted to see how the original was placed. And finding how easy it will be to reproduce this old garden I have decided to do so. I shall restore the water by piping, and the brook will tumble again down its old natural bed until it reaches my sister's garden where it will supply the fountain and form a pool for water-lilies. The fountain is the very thing which Glen Allen lacks, a satisfying goal toward which the garden path tends!"

His enthusiasm was contagious. "It will be very beautiful," Fiammetta replied, "and time will give its added charm as the years go by."

"I shall not be obliged to wait for time,"

Allen replied, "for I shall not allow the fountain to be restored or scraped or furbished up in any way but shall have it set exactly as it is."

A sudden transformation was wrought in the girl; he had seen her face angry before, but her eyes had never blazed like this. "You cannot mean," she said, "that you intend to have *this* fountain removed; that is impossible."

"Not at all. I had the opportunity to purchase this very fountain, and it is mine."

"You vandal!" The words struck him like a blow in the face.

"Signorina Floriano!" he cried, "what have I done to merit your indignation? The right to remove the fountain was offered me."

"You never could have the moral right to take one of these marbles away," she retorted, "for they belong to Italy. Have you no conscience? Can you not see that it would be as truly a theft as any of the acts of spoliation committed by the barbarian invaders? Napoleon carried away the bronze horses of St. Mark's; but France was forced to restore them. Have you pictured to yourself what this garden would be without its fountain?"

"What indeed?" thought Allen, and as the

devastation which his acquisition would create was revealed to him he stood before his accuser silent and confused.

Fiammetta realised her advantage and pursued it. "And what would the fountain be," she asked, "without the garden? For though it is a beautiful object in itself it owes the major part of its attractiveness to its setting. Its very dilapidation is appropriate and harmonious here. Its crumbling fragments are lovingly held together by binding vines. Its mutilated carvings are concealed under caressing mosses. Think of it stripped of these adornments, as well as of its associations, and expatriated, pitiable, dilapidated like the flotsam and jetsam of the auction-room, brought into cruel comparison with the ostentatious perfection of modern objects!"

"It could never be entirely stripped of its associations could it?" Allen asked apologetically. "It would always be the actual fountain around whose basin that merry party sat and held their disquisitions so long ago. It has other associations also for me. Pardon me, Signorina, if I presumed too much, but I fancied from my own love for this fountain and all for which it stands, that possibly if it found a fitting home with me, you also—"

but his voice broke, for she had turned from him abruptly, shocked and offended, as he thought, by the revelation of his love.

She faced him a moment later, her face ablaze with intense feeling. "If you care, as you say, for what this fountain represents why do you not preserve it and the spot which its associations make glorious for Italy?"

"Not for Italy," he cried, "but for you if you will say the word. Can you not see that I care nothing for what this fountain represents unless it represents *you*, nothing for dead and gone queens and courts of love—they were but pretexts, a meeting ground of common interest where we could learn to know each other."

"Then it was all a pretence?" she asked.

"All but my love for you, that is terribly real, Fiammetta, and has eaten up every desire that I once possessed. For you I will give up my ambitions and my country. We will live here together, your life shall be a never-ending Decameron of love and laughter and art. You shall make an Italian of me, for Italy has conquered its invader.

He held her close and she did not resist. It seemed to him that she consented, but her next words undeceived him. "No, no," she cried,

passionately, "I would be unworthy to accept such a sacrifice. Your place is over there with your own people. I could not respect you if you gave up your responsibilities even for me."

"You will not let me stay?"

"No."

He released her gently. "Pardon me," he said bitterly, "but you shall have your wish. I give back the fountain to Italy. My sister shall have hers also, for the reproduction goes to Glen Allen, since you decree that shams and deceptions are good enough for Americans——"

Her arms tightened about his neck. "No, no," she whispered, "you shall have your heart's desire too—the 'real thing' for *I* go with you——"

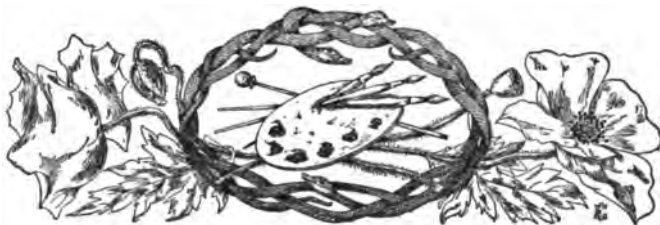
"And what is real but love?"



AVENUE OF CYPRESSES
In the Giusti Gardens

U.S. N.

Mr. Tol



CHAPTER IX

THE RING OF THE TWISTED SERPENT

A LEGEND OF THE VILLA OF CYPRESSES AS TOLD
BY ITS CUSTODIAN.

And whoso eats of the fruit thereof
Has no more sorrow and no more love.
And who sets the same in his garden-bed
In a little space he is waste and dead.

The Cypress—ANON.

“HOW old are our cypresses?” do you ask me Signora? As old as Verona, as old as Lombardy. Some were planted by the de la Scalas, some earlier still by Ezzelino, and there is an old stump yonder which they say was a tree before the Romans built their amphitheatre in the city. There are no such cypresses anywhere else in Italy. But this avenue which is most admired, which leads straight up the hill from the palazzo to that

giant head carved in the cliff, in whose cavern of a mouth the terrace staircase disappears—these cypresses, though they shoot upward like church spires and you break your neck and dizzy your brain when you try to watch their wavering tops, are the very youngest in our garden only a trifle of three hundred years or so. None have been set out since for fear of the fate of the Giustis who planted them, a fate which comes sooner or later to every planter of cypresses. You would have the story, Signora? It is strange how much more you Americans who have been guests of the Palazzina Giusti care for our legends than our own *nobili*. But you get them wrong for the most part. Even your great Shakespeare who was here so long and knew Romeo and Juliet could not spell their family names rightly. And as for his story of the Two Gentlemen of our city which the very reverend American Bishop read me, one sees well whom he meant, but if he had consulted me I could have given him points which would have bettered the relation.

No, you will not find the account of the tragedy of the cypresses written out in any of the old marriage books which the very Reverend Bishop was showing to you last evening. They do not write such things in the

family archives. Think you that the record of Ezzelino's cruelties is to be found in the eulogies which his descendants preserve? But they are remembered all the same and handed down from one mouth to another and lose naught by the way in the telling.

The Signora was admiring the façade of the palace frescoed exteriorly by the famous Bonifazio, the friend and rival of Paul Veronese, who left Verona in despair, and spent the greater part of his life an exile in melancholy Venice because he could not approach Bonifazio's grandeur of style. It is, indeed, a thousand pities that these peerless paintings were applied to the outer walls of the villa and that the plaster has in certain places peeled off so that it is difficult to discern what the original design may have been.

It was the same Conte Giusti who planted the cypresses who gave Bonifazio his commission for the frescoes, and if he had done neither of these things there would have been no story to tell. But these two acts alone show him to have been a true magnifico fond and proud of his ancestral villa and willing to expend what he could in its adornment. All that was possible I repeat, for with greater wealth he might doubtless have done more. It was the time

when the architect Palladio built the villas which are the glory of Vicenza—and our Michele San Micheli was adorning the palaces of our Signoria with columns and loggias. But look you it costs more to carve such things in precious marbles than to simulate them in paint which is cheap, and a little of which goes a great way. Therefore his Highness, the Conte Giusti, bade the artist (who made a specialty of the decoration of villas) cover the broad, white walls of his palace with such paintings of colonnades and arches, such long perspectives of gleaming pillars and delicately sculptured friezes and I know not what other architectural extravagancies such as would have been the despair of Palladio himself and if executed in enduring stone would have ruined an emperor. But seen from the proper distance all this scene painting had the effect which the Magnifico desired, and he gave banquets here in the garden and took more pride than ever in his palatial home, giving scant thanks or remuneration to Bonifazio who had made it so beautiful, so arrogant and so little regardful of the feelings of others was he that he even asked the artist why he did not build himself a house since he was so fertile in ideas. But the painter turned the taunt upon its maker for he replied that he carried his

house, like a snail, upon his shoulders and that like a snail's shell no disaster could deprive him of it while he lived, that moreover he could change its architecture for new according to his fancy in the twinkling of an eye whereas his patrons must content themselves with only such cast-off matter as he chose to bestow upon them. From that time Bonifazio took the snail as his device and signature and one can see it on all his works.

But there was one in the household who appreciated the painter's genius if the master did not, and this was the sister of the Conte Giusti, the beautiful Angiola. Her also the artist worshipped with hopeless passion for he knew the distance between them.

After the walls of the palazzo were frescoed Bonifazio would have been dismissed but for the Lady Angiola, who persuaded her brother to give him a commission for an important religious painting which should be a votive offering to the church of San Zeno. And this the Count who was as ostentatious in his religion as in his private life was willing to do. Paul of Verona was then making his reputation in Venice for his sumptuous "Suppers," and Giusti left the subject of the painting to Bonifazio stipulating only that it should be in this new style of Veronese's and should represent

himself, his wife, and his sister at table in the garden of the villa.

In order that the painter should have his canvas and his tools conveniently housed and should be himself near the scene of his labours, Angiola suggested that the palazzina at the end of the garden should be given him for his studio.

So here Bonifazio painted all one summer, for the insignia which he had adopted took upon itself an amazing appropriateness, the painting progressing with such snail-like slowness that had the painter bargained to be paid by the day Giusti would surely have taken alarm. But Bonifazio was heedful to tire neither his patron nor the Contessa Giusti by long sittings. It was the portrait of the Lady Angiola which gave him trouble; whatever may have been the reason he was never able to satisfy himself, but continually painted it out and began again. Angiola never tired of his incessant demands that she should pose for him and whether it was in front of the façade which he had decorated or, as the days grew too warm for out-of-door work, in his studio she held herself at his orders with infinite patience.

At last her brother's wife began to suspect



VILLA GIUSTI, VERONA

1900

what indeed it took no great depth of insight to discover. Bonifazio was in love with Angiola and Angiola with Bonifazio.

Womanlike the Contessa blabbed to her husband, from no malice toward Angiola but from sheer love of tattling, and now he glowered upon his sister on the watch for confirmation of the suspicion. A trivial incident occurred that very day as they were walking in the garden. A snail had crept upon the escutcheon of the Giustis which was carved upon a stone bench, and seeing it there the Conte Giusti plucked it from the seat and ground it to pulp beneath his heel.

"I will have no snails upon our family escutcheon," he said to Angiola, significantly. The red rushed to her cheek, but she answered fearlessly: "Nay, snails are harmless creatures, a scorpion would better typify the temper and deeds of the Giustis."

"You have spoken truer than you know," her brother hissed, "for the scorpion is the only creature who will suffer no contrariety and if imprisoned or otherwise thwarted in its will stings its own progeny and even itself."

Angiola needed no further explanation to understand that her lover's life and her own were threatened. For a time she gave up

posing in the studio at the end of the garden; but as she did not dare warn Bonifazio, this only hastened the catastrophe. He began to write her letters complaining of this change in her conduct, letters which were carried by the perfidious servants straight to the Conte Giusti.

She sent oral messages in return and now and then a glove, a lock of hair, or a flower, drawing on the incautious artist who was also a poet until he poured out all his heart in that series of canzoni with which the Signora is doubtless familiar. They were printed later and the book is in the library. The Conte Giusti little thought that they would one day be bound in velvet with the arms of his family in gold upon the covers. See, here is the very poem which roused him to such fury that he could endure no more.

I read it thoughtfully, noting how the artist's perception of Angiola's charms and despair at being able to reproduce them were blended with the lover's passionate longing.

Behold if any picture can compare
Or match her angel's colour like a pearl?

Rossetti said of this poem: "The original of

Ring of the Twisted Serpent 265

this love-song is not perhaps surpassed by any poem of its class in existence," and Rossetti, the poet-artist, alone could have given it fitting expression in translation:

I look at the amorous beautiful mouth,
The small, white teeth, the straight and shapely nose,
And the clear brows of a sweet pencilling,

And listen to her gracious answering,
And evermore my spirit makes avow
Touching her mouth; till now
I would give anything that I possess
Only to hear her mouth say frankly "Yes."

I look at the white, easy neck so well,
From shoulders and from bosom lifted out,
And at her round, cleft chin which beyond doubt
No fancy in the world could have designed;
And then with longing, grown more voluble,
"Were it not pleasant now," pursues my thought,
"To have that neck within these two arms caught
And kiss it till the mark were left behind?"¹

The old steward of the villa waited patiently until I had finished reading the canzone, and then placidly continued his relation.

There are many ways to compass death, Signora. The tyrant Ezzelino, who lived here

¹Fazio Degli Uberti, Canzone, *His Portrait of his Lady Angiola of Verona*, translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Rossetti, like Bonifazio, gave pictorial as well as literary tribute to Angiola's beauty.

twisted serpent with a ruby eye. Her father had once placed it upon her finger, and had told her that if any one dared to insult her honour she had but to wear this ring at their next meeting and taking his hand in pretended friendship to press the ruby—when lo, from the tail of the serpent there would dart a needle. “Then,” said the old Count, “clasp his hand firmly, turning your own ever so slightly. He will feel a prick, a scratch, but will hardly notice it if at that instant you draw his face close to your own and whisper, ‘Thus I forgive you.’ Then hasten quickly home and hide the ring before the officers of justice can follow you; for before you have time to hide it the insult to our house will be avenged and the villain will be dead.”

Having been so thoroughly instructed in the manner of vindicating the family honour, Angiola’s heart stood still when on the morning after Bonifazio had dared to send his sonnet her brother handed it to her to read. They were seated at their *al fresco* collation awaiting the coming of the painter, for it was to be their last sitting as a family group, and Angiola lifting her eyes from her lover’s poem saw with horror that her brother wore the ring of the twisted serpent.

"What do you mean to do?" she asked in a whisper.

"Nothing," he replied with a false smile, "it is not my affair," and then Angiola believed that the danger was past for the servants announced the arrival of a guest, the Canon of San Zeno whom the Conte Giusti had invited to call and see Bonifazio's painting, though he had not expected him at this particular juncture.

As yet Bonifazio had found no title for his picture, but had simply painted the portrait of his patron seated at table between his wife and his sister, with other members of his family as a group of musicians, and a young negro slave in rich oriental costume holding the music book.

The Conte Giusti, who was even less familiar with holy writ than the painter, trusted that the Canon of San Zeno would see in the picture some suggestion of a Scripture story and so help them in their dilemma. And this indeed the good man did, though the subject was not one which would have been expected to please its owner.

Servants brought the canvass and placed it upon the easel. Bonifazio himself arrived and soon all were discussing the painting.

1

The Rich Man's Feast

From the painting by Bonifazio Veronese in the Academy, Venice



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"You have but to place a beggar in this empty corner at the right," said the Canon, "and it would make an admirable illustration of the story of Dives and Lazarus."

"Who were they?" asked the Contessa unblushingly.

"Dives was a rich man and Lazarus an unfortunate who sat at his door and begged for the crumbs which fell from his table."

"Surely such a mendicant am I," laughed Bonifazio. "Lazarus shall beg for pity here and I will give him my own face."

"Nay," objected the Canon in some confusion, "now I mind me the chief personages of the parable do not in all respects resemble your noble patron and yourself."

"Tell us the story, Reverend Father," the Contessa besought, and the worthy man droned it forth for all the world as though he were reciting it to the monks of San Zeno at the time of their refecton.

"Halt there!" demanded the Conte as the Canon reached the words "Desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table."

"I will give guerdon better suited to the deserts of my Lazarus," and he handed the serpent ring to Angiola with the command:

"Give this ring to Bonifazio that he may understand how our family reward such works of genius as this."

All present except Angiola supposed that he referred to the painting, but the girl knew that he meant the audacious poem. She knew what she was expected to do with the ring but she sat as though frozen as the delighted artist stretched out his hand to receive it.

"Come nearer, Bonifazio," said the Conte mockingly. "It would seem from my sister's slowness that she were already of the family of snails. Public troth-plight can alone expiate secret love. Let me therefore assist at this betrothal scene," and he wrenched the ring from his sister's hand.

Angiola uttered a piteous cry and her head drooped upon her breast.

Giusti rose and gazed upon her, though none knew with what expression; for with the exception of the Canon (who from a persuasion that it was reverent to close his eyes when intoning the Scriptures had been blind to all that had passed) they had all flown to the help of the stricken girl. An instant later when the Conte entered the palace they imagined that he had gone for restoratives or to sum-



BONIFAZIO'S MISTRESS

From a drawing by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Permission of George Bell and Sons

1870

mon a physician. Bonifazio was on his knees before his lady chafing her hands and covering them with kisses. She felt them through her swoon and their passionate insistence called her back to life. Suddenly the blankness in her eyes changed to consciousness and she snatched her fingers from her lover's lips scanning them with the most minute scrutiny. There was neither scratch nor prick upon the delicate skin, but her face was only the more ghastly as she whispered "Where is my brother?"

All unconscious that he was replying to her question the Canon droned on:

" 'And in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torment.' "

Angiola's shriek was drowned by a commotion within the palace and the appearance of the major-domo, who broke his wand of office before the feet of the Contessa declaring:

"His Excellency, the very illustrious Scipione Scaligero Giusti, Lord of thirty estates and castles in the Marches of Verona, etc., is dead."

In his murderous attempt to wreak his vengeance upon the lovers the Conte had stung himself. The ring was found tightly clutched

within his stiffened fingers, its poisoned needle buried in his palm, so that there was no mistaking the manner of his death.

The Signora is doubtless informed of the later life of Bonifazio, how he removed about this time to Venice, dying there covered with honour at a ripe old age. She may also have seen his masterpiece, *The Feast of the Bad Rich Man*, in the Academia of that city, but though the very Reverend Bishop may have shown her the record of his marriage with Angiola I doubt if even he could tell what were the circumstances that led to their strange betrothal with the serpent ring, witnessed by the Canon of San Zeno and the Contessa Giusti at the insistence of the Conte himself in the very hour of his sudden and mysterious death.



CHAPTER X

HOW SORDELLO THE SILVER-TONGUED BECAME SORDELLO OF THE IRON HAND

THE old steward's legend of the "Ring of the Twisted Serpent" brought to mind another tale, matching it as an instance of fraternal affection turned to deadly hatred.

It was at Padua that the story was told us in a villa asserted to have been the residence of Ezzelino di Romano; and it had to do with a pathetic little hand, a woman's hand, which you may still see there nailed to a wooden block.¹

Nothing is too bad to believe of Ezzelino. "Hill-cat" the nobles of the day contemptuously called him when he first became known as the bandit lord of the obscure castle of Romano. "Hell-cat" all northern Italy cursed him, when, as the favourite captain of

¹ Mr. Howells wrote of it: "The sight had a most cruel fascination," and further states that while he "stood helplessly conjuring to his vision that scene of unknown dread, his companion with a sudden pallor demanded to be taken instantly away."

the Emperor, Frederick II., he conquered and sacked city after city, and unnumbered decapitations followed every surrender.

It was a hellish time, but Ezzelino violated even its barbarous standards and made himself execrated as the archetype of cruelty.

For weeks after he took Padua a heavy cloud hung over the city, the smoke of the burning of eleven thousand of its citizens; and when the wind blew from that direction the Mantuans believed that they could discern the nauseous odour of scorching flesh.

Mantua had known Ezzelino's father, old Ezzelo, before this, for he possessed a castle only nine miles away at Goito, where his wife Adelaide, and his youngest child, Cunizza, resided; though the boys, Ezzelino and Alberic, came here but seldom, for they were their father's constant companions in his private forays, and prominent always in the Ghibelline ranks.

Ezzelo had been bad enough, but in his old age feeling compunction for his many sins he had become a monk, and, hoping thus to placate the Pope and gain absolution for his crimes, had from his convent, betrothed his children to representative Guelfs, his daughter, Cunizza, falling to Richart, Count of San Bonifazio, the lord of Verona, for political

and private reasons the deadly enemy of young Ezzelino.

Just at this juncture there enters into the action of the family drama (whose characters are already so much at variance), the troubadour Sordello, the enigma of history and the hero of Dante and Browning. Hitherto he had lived a lonely and obscure life at the castle of Goito, brought up as Adelaide's page, his parentage unknown even to himself. Here, so early that he could never tell when the passion was lighted, Sordello had loved the beautiful and tender-hearted Cunizza. Only his supposed lowly birth kept his lips sealed when the lord of Verona came to claim his bride, and celebrated his espousals by holding a "Court of Love" at Mantua.

Until then Sordello's talent as a poet had been unrecognised, but on that supreme occasion his love and despair so stimulated his genius that he sang as none had sung before, winning the wild applause of all who listened and the prize of the contest given by Cunizza, whose

pure fleecy hair, one weft of which
Golden and great, quite touched his cheek, as o'er
She leant, speaking some six words and no more.
He answered something, anything; and she

Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
Upon him, her neck's warmth and all.

With this brilliant victory came Sordello's appointment as Cunizza's minstrel, and his removal with the bride and bridegroom to Verona. It was a loveless marriage, and the Count grew harder and colder, some writers say suspicious, for Sordello resided with them in the castle of San Bonifazio, whose ruins still subsist, exactly as they were left when Ezzelino sacked it a few years later for the Emperor.

Mantua at this time had no hereditary lord, no strong hand upon the helm. In a city where every one governs no one governs; unprepared like Florence by centuries of democracy for liberty, it was at this time a type of anarchy, and its citizens finding themselves in the face of a great danger like sheep without a shepherd cried aloud for a despot.

And Mantua remembered Sordello. He had created a profound impression at the time of the Court of Love, later he had written patriotic songs which its citizens sang, and just at this juncture an astonishing disclosure was made. The Lady of Goito dying confessed that Sordello was of the princely race of the

Visconti and not, as reputed, the son of a common archer. The news fired the imaginations of the Mantuans. Sordello was nobly born and fit by birth as well as genius to be their prince. Moreover the Visconti of Milan were at this time the strongest representatives of the Guelf party, and though they had not as yet acknowledged Sordello as their relative, when Prince of Mantua party interest might join hands with family pride and an alliance with Milan be doubly cemented.

A messenger rode in haste to Verona, offering Sordello the lordship of the city and begging him to come at once to its aid.

He was with Cunizza when the letter was delivered and he laid it before her, saying only "Had this come to me a year ago, before your marriage, then it might have had meaning. Now to what purpose is it?"

"Dearest," she answered, "have we not learned that life can be lived nobly without love? Go, and devote the service which you would have given me to Italy, and serve me too by holding back my brother from more villainies."

Ezzelino was at the gates of Mantua when at night Sordello dashed through the Ghibel-

line lines, and the Visconti ensign displayed beside the Guelfic standard from the castello told the besiegers at dawn that the city's saviour was on his throne.

The tyrant's headquarters that night had been a small convent called Santa Croce, and to the crucifix in front of its door the papal messenger had affixed the excommunication which he dared not present. Ezzelino read it with a laugh, and drawing his sword struck off the upper portion of the cross with the head of the sculptured Christ. "See," he cried, "how much I care for the Pope when I thus decapitate his master."

A shudder ran through the ranks, and the men fought but half heartedly that day when Sordello headed a sortie from the city and drove them back toward Padua. From that time the name of the convent was changed from the Convent of the Cross to the Convent of the T. It was enclosed within the moats which Sordello caused to be dug five miles outside the city walls filling them with the waters of the Mincio and turning the marshes into lakes.

Before his fortifications were completed a gruesome procession was discerned winding toward the eastern gate of Mantua. It could

scarcely from a distance be recognised as composed of human beings, for the wretched men and women rocked and writhed from side to side trailing themselves in agony. The inhabitants of an entire village had been deprived by Ezzelino of their legs and their eyes, one man alone having been left with one eye that he might guide them into Mantua.

So sickening was the sight that many cried out that the part of humanity was to put the tortured creatures instantly out of their misery. To this counsel Sordello would not listen nor to the more plausible arguments that "useless mouths," were by time-honoured custom always turned from cities in time of siege; and that if these unfortunates were sent adrift to beg their way each one would become an exponent of Ezzelino's cruelty and help stir up popular sentiment against him. Disregarding these considerations Sordello commanded that the wretches should be given shelter and care in the Convent of the T, and most fittingly so since its Christ had shared in Ezzelino's monstrous mutilations.

But Ezzelino, though temporarily beaten back, returned to the siege, and aided by the Emperor's mercenaries would have starved Mantua into surrender had not Richart of

San Bonifazio attacked Padua and bravely drawn the tyrant from the siege at the price of his own defeat and captivity.

Then, while the joy bells of Mantua were proclaiming the siege raised and the city saved a message came to Sordello from Cunizza, a prisoner in Padua, whether she had gone to treat with the Emperor for her husband's ransom. For Frederick had in person succoured the city, and feeling that the cruelty of his representative must be counteracted by a show of clemency had proclaimed a truce for the negotiation of peace with pardon for all who cared to sue for it.

Then Cunizza added news which made all that went before dwindle into nothingness. Her brother had met her upon her arrival and had told her brutally that both she and the Emperor had come too late for he had executed the Count of San Bonifazio.

She was a prisoner now in the lower apartments of the tower of Ezzelino's villa. Under Frederick's amnesty the lord of Mantua could safely come to Padua and demand her. She was a widow with no one to call upon but Sordello and she called him.

Sordello needed no entreaty from Cunizza; he set out instantly for Padua, and leaving his



PALACE OF ECCELINO AT PADUA

Mr. U

escort at a village in the environs entered the city disguised as a strolling minstrel. Cunizza's messenger, an old servant of the Count of San Bonifazio, had told him that the water-gate of the villa had by some oversight been left unguarded. He found it on the hither side of a sewer at the point where the filth of the city was discharged into the river. As Sordello hesitated on the brink he saw skulking in the dusk a man whom he imagined to be a sentry guarding his prisoner until the fellow told him that he had been posted there to carry him across the slough to the villa gate.

The voice was familiar and Sordello fancied that, like the messenger, he had known him as one of the servants of the family, until his bearer deposited him upon the steps and struck a light to unlock the door.

Then consternation and bewilderment seized upon Sordello, for through the grime which smeared the man's face he was certain that he recognised the features of Ezzelino.

The discovery, if it was a discovery, was so stupendous in its significance that Sordello stood for an instant incapable of action, and in that instant the man had disappeared.

A staircase stretched before him, a door opened on the landing above, and Cunizza's

voice softly called him. No danger could keep him back after that, and Sordello was on his knees before her covering her hands with kisses:

I' the palace, each by each,
Sordello and Cunizza; little speech,
At first in that dim closet, face with face,
Despite the tumult in the market-place
Exchanging quick low laughs; now would rush
Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
But for the most part their two histories
Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms.

For they were free at last to love each other. The night was almost gone before they could tear themselves from their present happiness to speak of the future and concert some plan of action.

"You must take me back with you to Mantua," she said. "My brother governs here, and we will not be safe in Padua, for though the Emperor pardon, Ezzelino never does."

"Nor would we be safe in Mantua," Sordello replied. "You shall fly with me this very night to France. Louis has invited me to his court. He celebrates the marriage of his brother Charles of Anjou to the heiress of Provence, and desires me to sing their epi-

thalamium. It shall have a different note from what he thinks, for Charles is a gallant knight, and I will sing Italy, Italy, until I fire his heart to come back with me and drive out this invader."

There had been stealthy footsteps on the stairs which neither of the lovers heard; but now a gang of ruffians with torches and weapons poured into the room and Ezzelino's hand descended with a mocking laugh upon the "locked fingers."

"You are right my sister," he said, "Ezzelino never forgives." I have heavy scores against you both, which I depute your husband to settle, for his honour will compel him so to do when he sees how you disport yourself in his absence though he has risked his life to rescue your lover."

"My husband," Cunizza stammered, "you told me he was dead."

"Dry your tears, Faithful Wife," sneered Ezzelino, "you are spared the expense of widow's weeds, and black was never becoming to you, Cunizza. The Count of San Bonifazio has passed an uncomfortable night in prison, but I have just persuaded him for your sake to sign his submission to the Emperor and to abdicate his lordship of Verona in my

favour. He will be here in an hour's time and will doubtless be as pleased as he will be surprised to see that you have summoned your troubadour to bid him welcome. Pardon me for this indiscreet intrusion, he shall find you both exactly as I found you."

With this he signed to a smith who stood waiting, sledge-hammer in hand, and while the other ruffians overpowered and disarmed Sordello, forcing him into the chair from which he had leapt, Ezzelino held the shrieking Cunizza as an iron spike was driven through the clasped hands of the lovers and into the top of a heavy oaken block.

Then placing his fainting sister on Sordello's knee Ezzelino left the tower with his bravi, hurling back taunts and ribald jests, and promising that the Count of San Bonifazio would soon be there with the Emperor.

"Have they gone?" Cunizza murmured. "Then take the stiletto hidden in my hair, and cut yourself free." A glance told Sordello that, as his right hand had been left unfettered, he could easily accomplish the task in his own case, for the spike had passed between the index and middle phalanges missing the important arteries. For Cunizza complete amputation would be necessary, but it was not

in dread of pain that she refused to submit to his rude surgery.

"We wrestled once before through the temptation to flee together" she said, "and agreed never to do so while my husband lived. Ezzelino will be thwarted when he comes again with his troop of witnesses. I shall not be shamed for I shall be alone, and Richart and the rest will believe that it was so Ezzelino found me. I see my scarf still around your neck, the prize of the Court of Love. Bind your hand tightly with it that they may not track you by the blood-drops and so, my Love, leave me and farewell."

"So by God's death I will not leave you," he cried, but even as he uttered the oath her head drooped upon his shoulder.

Congratulating himself that unconsciousness would dull her anguish, as it had removed her resistance, he hastily severed her hand from the wrist, only to find that this was no merciful swoon, but that because there was nothing left to live for, her gentle soul had left its weary body.

Reluctantly Sordello obeyed her last command, and rode night and day to Milan and thence to Arles, where St. Louis held his temporary court. Here there lingers still a tra-

dition of how Sordello carried off the chief prize, not indeed in the poetical contest, for here he was not a competitor, but in feats of arms in the tourney where he brilliantly overcame all champions, and was knighted by the King.

The Knight of the Iron Hand he was dubbed, for he chose a gauntlet as his blazon, and from that time he went always gloved in steel.

Years passed before he could persuade Charles of Anjou to contest the Emperor's claim to Italy; but when Pope Urban IV. invited the brother of St. Louis to assume the command of the two Sicilies and take up arms against Frederick's son, Manfred, Sordello's eloquence and Sordello's arm were mighty factors in the overthrow of the Ghibelline domination.

We may well question the noble title of Patriot which Dante awarded him since he but substituted the rule of one foreign usurper for another; but his character is consistent, not patriotism but revenge fired his heart as he won battle after battle for the Pope and his French allies. Four castles Charles gave him in the Abruzzi, and in all of these his governance was so stern that his serfs joined

in the uprising which brought in the Spaniard. Thus at last, an old man, Sordello died; and under the vine-clad ruins of his favourite castle, Palena, north-west of Naples, he is remembered not as the silver-tongued Italian troubadour or as the Prince and saviour of Mantua, but as the French knight, Main-de-Fer, partisan of the Angevin usurper, who fell in just penalty for his crimes, the violent man by the hand of the violent, at the bloody Sicilian vespers.



CHAPTER XI

THE "AMBER EMPRESS." A LEGEND OF THE VILLAS OF THE BRENTA

"YOU are like the Amber Empress," complained the young Count Frigimelica. "You are like her in many ways, Cleo, and it is not your fault that an evil fate overtakes all who love you."

"How do you know that I am like her?" the girl asked with sudden animation, "for you are right Girolamo, our profiles are identical. My father stationed me where my shadow would fall upon the wall, then holding the statuette nearer to the flame of the candle he found that the two outlines fitted exactly making one and the same silhouette."

"I am not surprised," the Count replied with a significant smile. "You are her incarnation. Your hair is like amber, your eyes are amber of a deeper shade. You are as brilliant, as precious, as beautiful, and alas! as cold and hard as amber. You are the very embodiment of our talisman."

"Why do you say *our*?" the young Contessa asked, growing suddenly more distant in manner. "Have you ever by chance owned the Amber Empress?"

"No, but you have just told me that your father owns it now. Some day it will be yours, and, in spite of your father's prejudice, you will be mine. I have sworn it, Cleopatra. Then there will be no yours nor mine, only ours, ours."

For an instant a flash of tenderness illumined the tawny eyes, and her lids fell as he kissed her on the mouth. Then she drew back from him with sudden anger.

"It is because I have thoughtlessly betrayed my father's secret. You only want me in order that you may possess the statuette. I am not to be won from such motives."

"Cleopatra, I would not endure the insult from another. I have loved you all my life, and you should know it. I care nothing for the Amber Empress, I do not believe in its magical power as a mascot. You and you alone are the only talisman I want. If I had your love as incentive I could carve my own way to success. You smile incredulously. Then listen. Your father may do what he pleases with that foolish fetich; but I declare

to you upon my honour, that I shall never ask your hand in marriage if you are to own it, for I will not have my motives vilified."

He offered her his arm with a flourish and they entered the ball-room together. It was time, for they had remained too long in the *loggetta* overlooking the moon-lit river, and their illustrious host, Alvise Pisani, Doge of Venice, was searching for Cleopatra to open the minuet with him.

The festival was one of those given almost nightly by the pleasure-loving patricians whose villas bordering the Brenta formed one continuous avenue between Venice and Padua.

The Venetian nobles in their stately sea-girt palaces, hemmed in as narrowly by convention and ceremonial as by limitations of space, longed for the expanses of meadows and gardens, and for the liberty and amenity of a less restrained social life. They found this in their spacious country-houses, which not only gave opportunity for hospitality and intimate and natural intercourse but also for new amusements and occupations not possible in such a city as Venice. Each could indulge here his favourite predilection, were it for following the beat of eight hoofs on a good road, for long

walks, for shooting in the marshes, or for dilettante farming.

The procession of small villas in gleaming stucco which now follows the Brenta, occupied for the most part by well-to-do Venetians of the middle class and loaded with a tasteless agglomeration of sculpture, will hardly give an idea of what this region was in the eighteenth century, the epoch of our story. Then the head of every house was inscribed in the golden book, and the families met upon the lines of acknowledged hereditary aristocracy.

Here they had loved and hated, intermarrying or slaying each other, according as a more intimate acquaintance developed affinities or uncongenialities. As was natural in a colony unfreshened by the influx of new elements, the rivalries of one generation were strengthened in the next, growing into ancestral feuds and vendettas, whose origin was often most trivial, and neighbours who might have been friends found themselves saddled with old revenges or bound as by fetters in compacts in which they had no present interest.

Such was the strange tradition of the Amber Empress.

Long ago, so long that the date was uncer-

tain, ten young bloods of the noblest Venetian families, members of the Hose Club (who sported the gorgeous parti-coloured hose shown in Bellini's pictures, and who delighted in freaks as startling and as fantastic) had gone down the Brenta to the lagoon on a fishing excursion. One remarkable haul their net made, for among the glancing fish was found a statuette of the purest amber. The discovery of so large a block in its native state would not have been a phenomenal occurrence, for at the mouth of the Po, only a little distance to the south the ancients located the mythical Amber Isles where the tears of the Heliades mourning their brother Phaeton were turned into amber, and they themselves into the poplars which fringe the banks. But what gave this particular object an incalculable value, and made its finding in this spot a nine days' wonder, was the fact that it was a statuette of such exquisite workmanship as would have made its sculptor immortal had he but signed his work.

It represented so superb a woman that all agreed that she must have been an empress; but when the young representative of the Giustiniani put forth his theory that it was undoubtedly the Empress Fausta and that he,

as a direct descendant of the Emperor Justinian, was entitled to claim possession of the statuette, the other nine scouted his claims, and agreed with the only one of their number who made any pretence to a knowledge of archæology, who asserted that it was a contemporaneous copy of that statue of Cleopatra which Cæsar placed in the temple of Venus at Rome.

Its transportation hither was of course a matter of conjecture, possibly Marc Anthony had caused the statuette to be carved and had lost it from his galley the tides bringing it to the lagoons; or perhaps after the battle of Mutina the Panaro had borne it to the Po, and the Po to the sea. There were many ways by which it might have come, all equally probable or improbable, and to combat Gius-tiniani the nine accepted the Cleopatra theory. But they were no nearer an agreement as to its ownership. All ten had their hands upon the net when it was drawn into the boat, and the suggestion that they should draw lots was at length adopted.

The owner of the boat, a young fisherman, who had accompanied them, was bidden to place ten fishes of exactly the same size in a row, first cutting open one of them and secret-

ing the statuette within it. To give the other fishes exactly the same appearance and weight they were to be similarly loaded with stones.

“It will, however, be an easy matter,” objected one of the most suspicious of the coterie, “for any one of us to gain possession of the treasure by foul means, if the winner is known. I therefore propose that each man defers the examination of his fish until his return to his home. Each will keep his own counsel, and if there is any one among us evil disposed he will not know where to seek for his booty.”

This proposition was also adopted; but as the fisherman had heard it and was a shrewd rogue he put stones in all of the ten fishes and secreted the statuette in his own share of the day's sport, not unnaturally holding that as he owned the net and the boat he should have some chance in the lottery. He gained nothing by his knavery, however, for the nobleman who had proposed that he should act in the stead of the goddess of chance had expected some signal from him as to the hiding-place of the Empress, and, not finding the statuette in the fish which the fisherman appeared to indicate, he went that night to his cottage,

bullied him into surrendering his booty, stabbed him, and dropped his body in the sea.

For centuries the Amber Empress went her wicked ways sowing dissension between friends, and instigating all manner of fraud and violence on the part of those who longed to possess her, for she was supposed to be a mascot, bringing good fortune to the one who temporarily held her in his keeping. It became an unwritten law that every species of artifice and trick was allowable in the search to discover her whereabouts, and the endeavour to secure her abduction.

One young noble had disguised himself as a chimney-sweep, and had ransacked all the villas of his friends until he had found and stolen the envied object, and then, having staked it against the hand of the lady whom he loved, had lost both talisman and lady in a series of games of cards with his rival.

Highway robberies had been committed by a masked stranger (supposed to be one of the coterie) who returned all valuables until at length the amber statuette fell into his hands. High-born women had bartered their virtue for its possession, and men suspected of owning it had been kidnapped and kept in lonely castle dungeons until the Empress was pro-

duced as their ransom. Once a bankrupt owner had sold it to a famous collector, who had been so imprudent as to have his portrait painted, holding this his most valued possession. But hardly had his acquisition of the coveted curio become known before the antiquary died mysteriously, nor was the Amber Empress discovered among his effects.

Just how, a century later, the Conte di Labia had obtained the sinister object even his daughter did not know.

It was a bust now, only four inches in height, for the murderer of its previous owner had sawn the statuette in two, and the Count had merely secured the upper portion. He presented it shortly before Cleopatra's birth, to his wife, who had been so impressed by the beauty of the sculptured face that she would trace its contours with her fingers, until her daughter's head lay beside it, and the wonderful resemblance being noted, the child was named for the bust's supposed original. The mother died early, but her delight in the talisman was inherited by Cleopatra, who on her sixteenth birthday had coaxed her father to have a slender golden chain attached to it that she might wear it hidden in her bodice.

January—Titian
Co. New York

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Alto

"Guard it as you do your honour," he had commanded, and not even her most intimate friends or servitors knew what object depended from the chain.

"'T is a locket with the portrait of some gallant," gossiped her young acquaintances.

"'T is a crucifix, or some holy relic," insisted the old nurse, and Beppo, the Count's valet, declared that he knew his master's character best, and that it was a stiletto which the Count had given his daughter for her protection.

Young Girolamo Frigimelica had often noted the golden thread and envied the unknown pendant, its nesting-place. He had spoken truly when he declared that he had loved her all his life, for they had played together, floating their toy boats in the Brenta and plucking the *fleur-de-lis* upon its banks from their infancy. In these early days Labia had loved the lad and there had existed a tacit understanding between the families that one day Girolamo and Cleopatra would be wedded. But when the young man, returning from the University of Padua, announced that he had decided to make architecture his serious profession Labia's disgust knew no bounds. To the older man the career of a soldier was the only one worthy of a nobleman. That any

man not a coward should prefer study to the field was inconceivable. Girolamo's pulses had never thrilled with the fierce joy of fighting nor had he masked his abhorrence of bloodshed by assumed bravado. Recently while strolling together in the early evening they had been attacked by ruffians, and although Girolamo disarmed his antagonist he did not follow up his advantage by killing him, as Labia had done; and the latter, totally misunderstanding the clemency which permitted the foiled cut-throat to slink away unharmed, had sworn that he would never accept such a milksop as his son-in-law. Nor was this all, for of late ambitious designs had begun to ferment in the brain of Cleopatra's father.

The Doge of Venice, Alvise Pisani, their neighbour and friend, was a widower, and by far the most desirable *parti* in all their circle of acquaintance. The alliance was almost too glorious, for what dowry had Cleopatra to match his fabulous wealth and the fame of his great ancestors?

Naught indeed save her marvellous beauty, and, yes, there was something else, and Labia hugged himself as he thought that the Pisani family had once owned the Amber Empress, and that while it was in their possession all of

the resplendent deeds had been performed which rendered the admirals of their name immortal. Nicola Pisani had fastened it to his standard when he defeated the Genoese under Doria, and his son Victor had fought under the same ensign when he made good his Christian name and was hailed the idol of Venice.

What would not his descendant give or do to recover the lost talisman.

"Wear the Empress," her father had bidden Cleopatra, as she left him to dress for the Doge's festival. "It matters not that in the dance he may catch a glimpse of it. I am willing that he, and that he alone, should know that it is yours, and giving it to you unreservedly, as I now do, I make the ruler of Venice your subject."

These significant words burned in Cleopatra's brain as she led the minuet with Alvisè Pisani. But side by side with the consciousness that she was the most envied and admired in all that brilliant assembly there throbbed the dull ache of her first quarrel with her lover. Why had she spoken so heedlessly and why had Girolamo replied with such unnecessary anger. It was only a lover's misunderstanding, but she knew that Girolamo was as stub-

He would never
 have been able to find a man in
 the world who was the owner of the
 same virtues. She then cast her eyes upon
 him with a look which never before pressed
 against his heart. Against her tender flesh and
 his own heart he struggled her should-
 ers to his arms, and raised Pisani's eyes.
 They were now caught not, caught the
 heart of the man and then a start recognised
 the man's eyes. To give him credit he had
 not been able to do. He had already been
 struck by the beauty of character as well
 as of the face, and had fully made
 up his mind to the course which he would
 pursue.

She was now in the room where she had quar-
 tered. She had been told her after the
 first night of the new building and crowded
 the room was still in a state inadequate
 to the needs of her friends. I
 was determined to build another far more
 beautiful. It must be as exquisite both within
 and without as a jewel basket, for I destine it
 to contain the treasure which in all the world
 I most love, and it must be worthy of that
 treasure. Tell me if you have any sugges-
 tions, for I prefer it to please you rather

than the ablest experts. I have already engaged Tiepolo, the most famous artist of our day, to decorate its ceilings. But I have not yet decided on my architect. If Palladio or Longhena were but living! But whom have we now in Venetia capable of designing anything really noble?"

Cleopatra's heart beat fast. "Your Excellency," Cleopatra answered, "I know the very architect who could execute such a commission worthily. Count Girolamo Frigimelica is an enthusiast in his profession. He took it up not for gain but in the hope of creating grand and beautiful works to the glory of his country."

"Indeed," Pisani replied wonderingly, "and what buildings do we owe him? It is strange that I have not heard of so great an artist."

The girl blushed. "He is as yet an unknown genius, my Lord, but genius he is, as I know full well, for I have seen his drawings. If your Highness would only give him this opportunity to realise in stone the beautiful visions which are floating through his mind, he will give you a palace which will redound to your future fame as well as to his own."

But in the same degree that Cleopatra

waxed warm with the intensity of her enthusiasm Pisani grew cold, shrewdly guessing the springs of her interest.

"I will think of this matter" he said, "it is too important to be immediately decided."

"Only let him submit plans," the impulsive girl besought. "They will speak for his talent much more eloquently than can I. Your Excellency shall have the most lordly palace in all Venetia."

"You have the career of this young genius very much at heart?" asked the Doge. "Favours such as this commission would be for him are bought and sold in our corrupt age. Is there any possible fancied right which he would surrender or which you would offer in return for this introduction to fame? Think well, for I am accessible to no ordinary bribe.

I have already told you that my only desire in possessing so regal a palace is that it may be the temple for a divinity whom I idolise. I think you can guess to whom I refer. When I have done all I can to make your protégé the most famous architect of his time shall I have my goddess?"

"It is the Amber Empress that he means," thought Cleopatra. "You shall have her," she promised, radiant as she realised that with

its surrender this hateful barrier (for so Girolamo had constituted it) would no longer exist between her lover and herself. "You shall have your heart's desire when your villa is completed, only until then say nothing of our compact to any one, least of all to Count Frigimelica or to my father."

"Your commands shall be obeyed," the Doge replied bowing gravely; and before the young architect had left the ball-room he had received the commission which was to fulfil Cleopatra's prediction by handing down to succeeding ages his own name and that of his munificent patron. Both Pisani and Girolamo believed that the villa was to be her home, and neither expense nor labour was spared to make it worthy the woman whom they both loved. The younger man convinced that Cleopatra had discarded him for the Doge worked feverishly, bitter thoughts goading him on as exquisite drawings blossomed beneath the lamp which swung above his study table. The young girl from her chamber window could see it gleaming far into the night. "He little guesses that his first great opportunity comes to him through me," she said to herself. "He is too busy to waste his time upon me like the men-butterflies of our set who spend their

days in idleness and their nights in dissipation, and I honour him for it; but he might at least give me some sign that I am not forgotten."

But no sign came from Girolamo. Alvise Pisani on the contrary, though restrained by his promise, could not help showing the false hope which buoyed up his heart, laughed in his eyes, and held erect the aging shoulders which bore the heavy burden of the affairs of state.

The following winter he was often at the palazzo of the Labias, and people marked his close friendship with its owner. Pisani made him one of his councillors and allowed his own commissions to be delayed that his favourite artist, Tiepolo, might decorate the ceiling of the Labia palace with one of his most gorgeous frescoes. Labia himself took courage from this favouritism to propose to Pisani the alliance which he had so much at heart.

"It is my dearest ambition, old friend," the Doge replied, "but I would have no constraint brought to bear upon your beautiful daughter. Next summer in the freer life of our villeggiatura on the Brenta I trust she may learn to know me better, and may find me not altogether repulsive. As to the Amber Empress which you tell me you have given her, leave her absolutely free to bestow it on whom she



ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA
By Tiepolo, in the Palazzo Labia, Venice

1970

will. Let it be gained once in its history through no crime. Your daughter has asked me to suggest a subject to Tiepolo for your ceiling. He shall paint her, and he can find no more beautiful model in all Venice. Let the artist show her in the character of the Empress whose namesake she is, dissolving the pearl at the banquet which she gave to her lover."

"I see, I see," exclaimed Labia, "the pearl will typify the amber talisman, and you shall be her Antony. The ceiling shall be unveiled at your wedding."

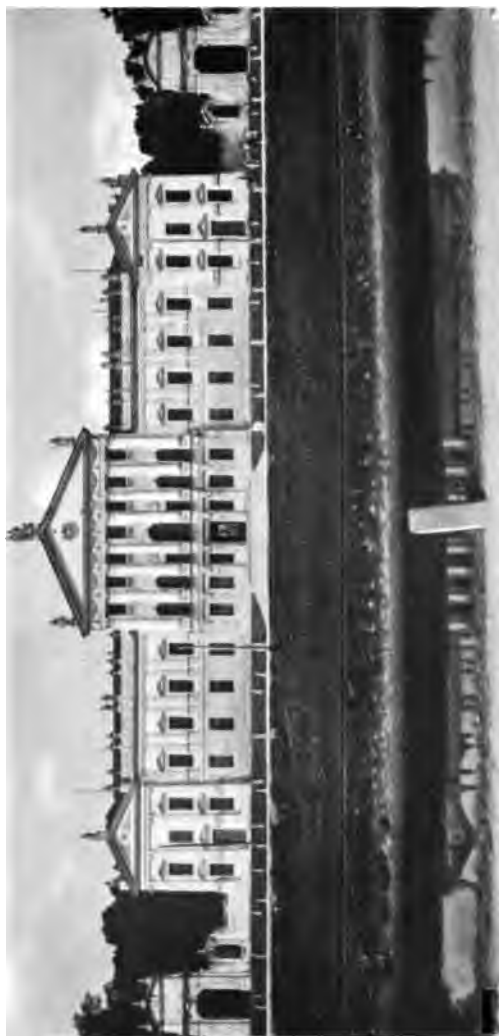
So time and events flowed noiselessly on, and the patrician colony was back again in its summer haunts. Pisani's villa which had been building at Stra was nearing completion.

The work grew now with the rapidity of some marvellous flower. The forty acres of garden gave to the palace its appropriate entourage. The hedges and orangeries, the maze and the system of canalisation which even now excite our admiration had come into being. Well-heads of carven stone topped with wrought iron emulating the tendrils and foliage of clinging vines took their places, the fresh whiteness of Carrara marbles glistened in statues rivalling the snow-spray of the

fountains. Gardeners were filling the parterres with blossoming plants, metal workers hanging the gates of gilded bronze, and the mosaicists were unrolling their enduring carpets in the tessellated pavements of the great salon. Overhead Tiepolo, on his swaying trapeze, was touching in the last tints on that ceiling where his goddesses riot in clouds "as delicate, as evanescent, and aërial as the miracle of a sirocco day upon the canal." But his glorious decorations which have a trick of making much of the architecture with which they are combined seem mean and petty had found at last their proper setting, and were matched in grandiose effect by the river front and in charm by the more fanciful garden façade, whose garlanded columns and classical pediments were joined by balustrades where Greek vases alternated with goddesses standing on tiptoe against the blue Italian sky.

The unfinished building swarmed with visitors who congratulated Frigimelica upon his success.

Alvise Pisani had fulfilled his promise, Girolamo was already famous, and the Doge not unnaturally thought that he might claim his reward. An excursion in which the Labias had invited him to join them seemed to him



VILLA PISANI AT STRA
By Count Gerolamo Frimelica

32

a propitious occasion for a complete understanding with his beloved.

Cleopatra had chosen a singular spot for a picnic ground, the long uninhabited and even then ruined villa of Jacopo Foscari. It was his widow who had given the stately house its significant name of Malcontenta.¹

The paths were weed-grown, the fountains dry, and the palazzo closed. No greater contrast to the flaunting glories of Pisani's villa could have been imagined, but the sentiment breathed by its very decay found Cleopatra in a sympathetic mood. Her father prated of the history of the two Foscari, in particular of the magnificence of Lucrezia Foscari's marriage ceremonies; how the bucentaur brought one hundred and fifty noble dames to lead the bride to her new home, and he wondered whether the canal of the Brenta were deep and wide enough to permit the bucentaur's being rowed to Stra.

Suddenly perceiving that his absence might conduce more than his eloquence to bringing about the end which he so devoutly wished, he strolled away to inspect the stables leaving his daughter and his friend to their own devices.

¹ On her retirement to this refuge after the double tragedy with which Byron has made us familiar.

The Doge was not slow to seize the opportunity, and the grievous misunderstanding under which he had loved and laboured was made plain to him. The disillusionment was bitter, and Alvise Pisani's eyes darkened with resentment, while his firm mouth grew hard and cruel. But he uttered no word of reproach to Cleopatra, and when she broke the fateful amulet from its chain and urged him to accept it, he pressed it gently in her palm and closed her fingers over it. "This is not the Empress I coveted," he said, "may she bring you all happiness and good fortune."

She watched him striding down an ilex-shaded path. "I have lost the best friend that ever woman had," she cried, and burst into bitter weeping.

"Nay, that you have in me," said a voice in her ear, and she looked up to find Girolamo Frigimelica at her side, his arm about her and his face close to hers. "I heard," he confessed, "I could not choose but do so, for I was sketching behind the acacias, and I am thankful that I did hear, for now there is naught save death that shall part us."

Her eyes were suddenly dry. "Go quickly," she besought, "or death may come sooner than you think. My father must

not meet you in his first disappointment. It will be long before he will forgive you, and I fear Alvisè Pisani will never do so."

"I shall not go," Girolamo replied. He was recklessly happy, and he laughed as he held her closer. "What do I care if they kill me now? I have lived! You love me and death is a little price to pay for that knowledge."

"Then pay it now!" cried the furious Labia, who, with Pisani, had returned in time to overhear Girolamo's declaration. He was beside himself with rage and catching sight of Cleopatra's broken chain and the amber bust lying disregarded on the ground he charged the young man with wresting it from her. "And from that sanctuary!" he shrieked. "I have long known you for a coward. I brand you now as a thief. Free me, Pisani, for since the ruffian has so grossly insulted my daughter he must die."

"I have not insulted her," Girolamo retorted, "unless you so regard my honourable love; and that I am no coward I will prove by fighting for her, and if need be by dying for her. As for that cursed amber fetich, may it choke me if I have laid my hand upon it."

"You shall have your wish," cried Labia.

"Hold him, Alvise, and I will thrust it down his throat."

"All in good time, my Friend," interrupted Pisani. "As Doge of Venice I forbid you to fight. Your charges are such as I must decide upon in my official capacity. To-morrow evening I will deliver my verdict at your villa. Let Count Frigimelica appear and submit to it, if he would not brand himself as contumacious to the authority of the Republic."

Girolamo bowed his assent, though he knew that his judge was his disappointed rival and his bitterest enemy. A smile of scorn curled Pisani's lips as Labia had uttered the word "coward"; and Girolamo had heard him mutter, "I will save her from that fate. She shall never be the wife of a dastard."

It was therefore with the consciousness that he had need of all the courage that he could muster and with no assurance of a happy issue from his peril that the young man kept the appointment.

As his gondolier skilfully moored his gondola in front of the Villa Labia Girolamo noted with some surprise that a number of other boats were already in waiting. The Doge's barge was drawn close to one side of the little landing. On the other was fastened

the long black gondola of the Ten, the curtains of its funereal fellsa tightly closed; while the archiepiscopal coach of the primate of Mira was waiting at the door of the Labia chapel, whose windows glittered with the light from the altar candles. At intervals along the road musketeers mounted guard, and when Girolamo entered the villa he saw that the principal hall was lined with soldiers. A second glance told him that they were the familiars of the Council of Ten, and a cold shiver ran through him as he strove to guess what the presence of this sinister cortège might signify.

The servant who admitted him led him between their ranks raising the portière of a dressing-room panelled with Venetian mirrors. Here a valet presented him with a court costume of white satin embroidered with silver. "My master," he explained, "neglected to request you to come in gala attire, and begs your permission to make amends for his thoughtlessness."

Girolamo allowed himself to be robed with spirits not at all in harmony with this festal finery. From the dressing-room he was shown to the principal apartment of the villa, the great hall used only on state occasions. On a raised dais at the end and under a baldachino

of crimson velvet was the throne provided for the Doge and only occupied by him during ceremonial visits. He was seated upon it now an imposing figure, with his stern, inscrutable face and a dignity of bearing which owed nothing to his ducal robes and other regalia.

At his side stood Labia all the anger gone from his white face. He had hoped until now that Girolamo would not come. His passion had flared like light flame and had burned itself out, for it had nothing in common with the cold implacable desire for revenge which follows an injury in such a nature as Pisani's, and he cursed himself for having delivered Girolamo into his power. "Fool," he said to himself, "why did he not flee the country while he had the opportunity? God grant he show himself now the coward I deemed him, for I would not have his death upon my soul."

With this unspoken prayer he forced himself to maintain outward composure while he addressed his guest:

"Before you submit yourself, Count Frigimelica, to the ordeal which his Highness is about to impose upon you, let me explain that you are at liberty to refuse it and to leave my

house in safety. You will simply sign this letter to me stating that you relinquish for ever all pretensions to my daughter's hand preferring very naturally your own life to her love."

"That will I never do," replied the young man proudly, "be the alternative what it may."

"Then," replied Labia turning an appealing face to the inflexible one at his side, "I withdraw my accusation of cowardice, for you are braver than I thought."

"Not so fast," commanded the Doge. "The accused knows nothing as yet of the consequences which must follow the decision which he so lightly announces. Are you willing, Count Frigimelica, to stake your life (leaving it in the care of whatever saints you choose to invoke) upon your innocence of the charge preferred by the Conte di Labia, and so to endure the test which I now propose, on my solemn promise that whether Heaven works a miracle in your behalf and vindicates you, or whether you stand at its close a convicted and a dying man, you shall still be married within the half-hour to the Contessa di Labia?"

"I am willing," Girolamo replied, utterly dazed. He had little faith in miracles, never-

theless a faint hope sprang up in his heart that, if he carried himself as a man should, all might yet be well. "I am more than willing my Lord, if the Signorina will accept me as her husband on these terms."

The Doge smiled, but his face was more cruel than before. "I understand," he replied, "you think to shelter yourself behind her affection. It was cleverly thought out. The Contessa, you flatter yourself, loves you and will consent to nothing which can harm you. You believe that I love her, and argue that I will do nothing to cause her pain. You do me credit perhaps for more magnanimity than I possess. You are right, however, in believing yourself beloved, and I have made the Contessa very happy by promising that you shall marry her this night and that never, *so long as you live* shall I trouble her with any reference to my own affection."

Girolamo's heart gave a wild leap and stood still.

"You mean to assassinate me, and to marry my widow?" he asked.

"The word assassination is hardly a politic one for you to use at the present juncture, Count Frigimelica, but you may dismiss one cause of anxiety from your mind. Should

you chance to precede me in leaving this world the Contessa Frigimelica shall not be left without a protector."

The Doge's answer left no room for doubt. Since Girolamo was unwilling to relinquish his beloved he must die, and it only remained for him to inquire the manner of his death.

"The ordeal," replied Pisani, "was your own suggestion. You will remember that when the Conte di Labia accused you of snatching the amber talisman from his daughter's bosom your reply was 'may it choke me if I have laid my hand upon it.' You will therefore repeat this imprecation before the altar and then swallow the talisman. If you live you will be vindicated, if you die you will have brought your doom upon yourself."

Girolamo understood the demoniacal hatred and cruelty veiled by the words. Gian Galeazzo Visconti had once ordered that a peasant taken poaching should have the hare which he had caught thrust down his throat, and the wretch had died in frightful agony.

What Alvisè Pisani demanded was suicide. The young man paled slightly. "I have said it," he replied. "If God exists He will maintain my innocence, and in any case I

count death a cheap price for the privilege of calling her my wife."

"Bravely answered," cried the Conte di Labia, and throwing himself upon his knees before the Doge he begged for Girolamo's life.

"Do you realise," Pisani asked, "that we have promised the Count that he shall wed your daughter? Are you ready to receive him unconditionally as your son-in-law?"

"That I am," cried Labia, for he has proved himself worthy of her. "Could any one have met your ordeal more nobly?"

"His words have been brave," Pisani admitted. "But words and acts are different matters. Let the test be carried out. Is your daughter ready?"

"Her maids are robing her for her bridal, your Highness."

"Bid her attend our summons with the archbishop in the ante-room. Call the priest and my physician, and we will proceed at once to the ordeal."

Girolamo knelt and, having prepared himself reverently for death, felt its bitterness pass. The touch of the physician's fingers as he loosened his collar was like that of an executioner, but he did not falter, and when a

servant offered him a tray bearing the amber bust he stretched out his hand to take it.

"Stop!" cried Labia in an agony of apprehension, "his Highness has made no provision as to *how* you shall eat this cursed object. Carve it with your dagger and swallow the fragments one by one, it may be that so you will escape death."

The physician shook his head. "Splinters and sharp-cutting edges will be only the more deadly," he said.

"Then fetch a file and I will smooth them for him." But as Labia decapitated the Amber Empress with a blow of his stiletto and its point struck a dent into the silver dish, a look of perplexity crossed his face changing to one of astonishment as he grasped and as suddenly relaxed his hold upon the head. The Doge had hidden his face behind his hand, and his frame shook with supposed emotion; but Girolamo in his absorption saw none of these suspicious signs. To him it was the supreme moment of his life, and receiving the head of the Amber Empress from Labia's hand he swallowed it, believing that in so doing he sealed his fate. As he did so a chill as of death shot through his frame radiating from the mass which choked his throat. Cold, cold

it was as very ice; his muscles were frozen as with lockjaw, and the pain of the nerves leading to his brain was well-nigh intolerable. But it was not such pain as he had anticipated, and presently the congealed lump melted and slipped away leaving in his mouth a sweetness so intense that it, too, was pain.

Girolamo stared about him angrily. "It has pleased you to make a mock of me," he cried, "of my love, my honour, my courage, and my religious faith, and you dare to stand laughing in my presence. This insult is harder to bear than the crime which I believed you meditated, and may I never be forgiven if I forgive you."

"Nay speak not so," Alvisè Pisani entreated extending his hand. "This trick on all you hold so dear, as you deem it, was a true test, for it has proved the sincerity of your religion, your courage, your honour, and your love. Only to such a man was I willing to resign one whom I could never hope to win. Without it, too, our friend, the Conte di Labia, would hardly have begged you to become his son-in-law, for through it he has seen you worthy of that honour. It was your name, Count Frigimelica, which suggested the modelling of the Empress in *frozen honey*.



VILLA GIACOMELLI AT MASER
By Palladio

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Not Cleopatra but her lover has drunk the melted pearl. As to who shall be the future possessor of the talisman that is a matter of altogether minor importance, for his grace the Archbishop stands at the high altar and the bride awaits her bridegroom."



CHAPTER XII

THE GHOSTS OF GIACOMELLI

FRAGILE both by name and nature was Fragilia.

Fragile and exquisite of body as the most precious Venetian glass. Exquisitely delicate of soul as the wind-flower, whose snowy petals quiver at the faintest breath, such was Fragilia, as she left the convent, where her girlhood had been passed, to join her parents in their new villa of Giacomelli, near the little town of Maser in the Trevisan.

It was a worthy shrine for such a divinity, and one not negligible by any lover of those dreams of Greece with which Palladio made famous the environs of Vicenza. Very wonderful it had seemed to Fragilia as she had seen it a year before, fresh from the hand of the master architect, its marbles glittering white against the blue Italian sky, and its



VILLA ROTONDA, NEAR VICENZA
By Palladio

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sculptures sharply perfect from the recent touch of the chisel.

But during the past twelve months the interior of the villa had been glorified by the adornment which is still its chief distinction, its walls blooming into sumptuous form and colour under the brush of the great Veronese.

Both architect and painter were friends of Marcantonio Barbaro, Fragilia's father; but it was not because he was one of the noblest and wealthiest of Venetian grandees that they had given him of their best, but out of their love and admiration for his brother Daniele by whom indeed they had been commissioned to the work.

For Daniele Barbaro was older than Marcantonio, and the hereditary head of the house. Though talented as an artist (his paintings decorate the Ducal Palace) both he and his brother were early destined to careers of diplomacy, Daniele having served as Ambassador to the Court of Edward IV. of England and Marcantonio during the regency of Catherine de' Medici to that of France.

On his return from England Daniele had given the order to Palladio for the Villa Giacomelli, but the architect overwhelmed by his immense popularity neglected its execution

for many years, and during that time his patron in the prime of manhood resigned all his rights of primogeniture to his brother and took upon himself the religious life. But even here Daniele Barbaro could not escape honours, and has become one of the Governors of the University of Padua and Patriarch of the See of Aquileia. In all this time he had not lost interest in his villa, and at last it was executed according to the original plans and presented when finished to his brother, Marcantonio, who, in the estimation at least of many who regarded themselves as peculiarly knowing, had become the fortunate husband of a lady who had been unavailingly loved by Daniele.

In opposition to this theory the facts were conspicuous that there had been no breach in the affection which existed between the two brothers and that, though the Patriarch on rare occasions visited the family, there had never been the least whisper of scandal in regard to his conduct, which indeed was always most innocent and exemplary.

In the affection of his niece, Fragilia, the good man found consolation and compensation for the great disappointment of his life. It was on her uncle's knee that the child

listened to the legends of the saints, and from his instruction that she received her strong religious bias.

The Patriarch of Aquileia had attended the closing exercises at Fragilia's convent-school and was now bringing her home. It was an uncomfortable though magnificent coach which jolted and bumped over the wretched roads, but roads and vehicle were the best that the time afforded. Uncle Daniele chatted little, for he was deep in a precious manuscript which he had unearthed at Padua, nothing less than a discourse of the blessed Saint Antonio, taken down as the words fell from his lips, by a contemporaneous scribe. The Patriarch explained the cause of his preoccupation to his niece, and more interest than might have been expected in one so young showed itself in her expressive face.

"Is it the sermon which he preached to the fishes, Uncle Daniele?"

"Nonsense! of course not—that is, ahem! not that particular manuscript," and the old man readjusted the great round spectacles which a violent lurch had dislodged from his nose.

"Uncle Daniele," Fragilia ventured after a pause, "is it true that on the eve of the festival of Saint Antonio maidens who burn a

candle to him will see the presentment of their future husbands, and to those who are to die within that year the Saint appears in person?"

"Nonsense!" again exclaimed the worthy man. "I cannot imagine who can have worthy your head with such silly stories."

"It was our good Mother Superior," Frangilia replied.

"What! Mother Annunziata? I fear that I was absorbed in my reading and did not quite understand what you were saying, for whatever that holy woman told you must be true, in a certain sense, of course, in a certain sense."

"Is there anything in your manuscript about it, Uncle Daniele?"

"Why yes, now that I think of it, there certainly is," and the Bishop reread to himself from the Saint's exposition of the text, "Feed my lambs."

"He were a foolish shepherd who would give to yearling lambkins the fodder required by voracious bell-wethers and strong-stomached ewes." "Yes, my Lambkin," he added, "the wise Saint knew that the hearts of little maids are ever curious to know what the future has in store for them, and so to those who keep themselves ever dutiful and sweet he sends in good time a love to match their own."

"And to those to whom no such love is destined, Uncle Daniele?"

"To them he gives the lily of purity, betrothing them like St. Catherine to Christ."

The girl sighed softly, and the good Bishop was about to tell her how much better such a life was than the happiest world-existence when a glance at the smile which beatified her lovely face, and the blush with which some sweet memory tinged her cheek, locked his lips.

After all had his own career answered his anticipations? Did he from his heart desire for this beloved niece the lonely life of the cloister? He drew her gently toward him and imprinted a kiss upon her forehead. "The nuns of your convent have made me some beautiful altar candles," he said, "of the purest wax, each one ten pounds in weight, all garlanded with exquisitely modelled flowers. I had them sent to Villa Giacomelli with six tall silver candlesticks to be placed before the votive picture which Paolo Caliori has just finished for the chapel altar. Oddly enough it is Saint Antonio, whom I asked him to represent, and his festival is near at hand. You shall light the candles on its eve, and beseech the kind saint for a husband good, gallant, and

handsome, whom he will surely send to you within the year."

The blush on Fragilia's cheek deepened painfully and her eyes fell.

"I burned my candle to Saint Antonio when I was at home a year ago," she confessed, "on the altar in the chapel, though there was no painting then above it."

"What," the old man asked, "the sly puss! and Saint Antonio has sent no one? Well, the year lacks a fortnight to its finish. You have been shut up all this time in the convent, where lovers are not admitted. They will be thicker than bumble-bees in a rose garden at the fête your parents give to welcome your return."

Fragilia was truthful, but a new timidity overpowered her and she could not tell her uncle her strange experience of the previous year,—how, as she knelt in the bare, newly finished chapel, a young man had entered from the sacristy, and pausing by the altar steps, where the bridegroom awaits his bride at the wedding ceremony, had looked at her fixedly.

She would never forget his face, noble and at the same time ascetic in its delicacy, with eyes that had burned themselves into her mem-

ory. So he had stood for a full minute, and then a smile had lightened the melancholy of his expression and with the gracious salutation, "*Ave Virgo, gratia plena,*" he had vanished.

Fragilia believed implicitly that Saint Antonio had sent her this vision of him who was to command her heart, and she had dutifully waited all these weary months for her sovereign lord to appear in person and claim his empire. Of late the hope had almost died out; but now joy made her face radiant. Uncle Daniele was a wise and truthful prelate, his words were law in the councils of the clergy, and he had said that Saint Antonio would not betray her faith.

Gaily she greeted her parents as they met her at the entrance of the beautiful villa, and led her through the newly decorated apartments, the immense ball-room shortly to be inaugurated by Fragilia's formal presentation to the acquaintances of the family, and all of the elegant but smaller rooms which on the south side of the villa were their residence.

The northern suite, reserved for the Patriarch, was not immediately shown to Fragilia, but she found sufficient to enjoy in the other portions of the stately villa, whose garden

front measured nearly three hundred feet. There were the stables, too, with their stud of horses and the dogs, her father's especial delight.

Then there were her own house pets, the tiny spaniel and a parrot which the architect Palladio had given her upon her former visit.

On this her first evening at home there was company at dinner, among others the distinguished painter Paolo Caliari, whom his townspeople now proudly called the Veronese, though they had allowed Venice to introduce his genius and other cities to compete in their patronage before granting him their tardy recognition.

Her father and her uncle had been among his first admirers, and had procured for him the opportunity to paint for several convents the royal banquets in which he so revelled and excelled. It mattered little to Veronese whether the subject were the marriage at the village of Cana, or the feast at the house of the wealthy Simon the Pharisee, he depicted each with the same ostentatious display of pomp. His tables groaned with gold and silver services, and were set out in palaces of Renaissance architecture. His guests were robed in the most sumptuous velvets and

cut in the fashion of the day, and were themselves illustrious personages whose faces were familiar in Venice. For Caliarì was more regal than any sovereign and more than any prince of that time deserved the title of Magnificent.

Of late his reckless indulgence in the exuberance of his fancy had plunged him in serious danger—for, representing the sacred scene of the Last Supper in his characteristic *mondaine* manner, the Holy Office had called him in question for his employment of musicians, dwarfs, and buffoons with the appanage and characteristics of a Bacchanalian orgy or at least of a convivial banquet.

Veronese had pleaded thoughtlessness, absorption in decorative effect rather than in a proper consideration of his subject, and so many influential friends had come to his defence, among these Daniele and Marcantonio Barbaro, that the painter had been rescued from the claws of the inquisition, and spirited away from Venice.

This was the principal topic of conversation at dinner, and the artist regretted that he had been obliged to alter his painting, erasing the buffoons and jesters and especially a monkey of which he was very fond and whose portrait

he had hoped to leave in some important picture.

"Beppo is more than my pet," he explained, "he has long been my companion, and he is tenderly attached to my son, as indeed he ought to be, for Carletto saved his life."

"How did that happen?" Fraglia asked, and thus besought the painter related the finding of Beppo.

"My son was belated one winter night in the mountains and obliged to stop at a miserable inn. It had been a fête day in the village, the hostler was drunk, and Carletto was obliged to put up his horse. As he led him into his stall and attempted to fasten the halter, the animal, usually gentle, reared in fright, and Carletto looking in the manger discovered a monkey apparently dying of cold and hunger and lying, with hardly the strength to chatter, upon the hay where he had been abandoned by some mountebanks.

"My son took him to his room, warmed and fed him, and when he left the place brought him away snugly tucked within his cloak. The result has been that Beppo is most inordinately grateful to Carletto and overwhelms him with his attentions. I took the little foundling off his hands, and in turn have become so at-

tached to him that I brought him with me on leaving Venice, thus saving him from death a second time, for the inquisition had placed its seal on my studio door, and if I had left Beppo there he might have starved or possibly have been slain as the model for my sacrilegious paintings."

"You did not dare to break the seal of the inquisition?" the Patriarch asked anxiously.

"Nay, Beppo saved me the trouble, for hearing my voice outside he forced the little wicket in the door, through which my manservant was accustomed to scrutinise my callers before admitting them, and through that small opening leaped to my shoulder. I closed the wicket carefully and none save you who hear me, are the wiser."

"And have you brought Beppo with you?" Fragilia eagerly asked.

"Yes, noble Signorina, and with your gracious permission I will present him to you, for he is a somewhat inconvenient travelling companion."

Fragilia accepted the gift with delight, little dreaming of the annoyance of which this small demon was to be the cause; and indeed in the following fortnight neither she nor any of the other inhabitants of the villa

paid much attention to Beppo, for many strange things happened which, had the building been an older one, would certainly have given colour to the belief that it was haunted. But who ever heard of spirits either good or evil taking up their abode in a house whose walls had arisen only the previous year and whose interior adornment was not yet completed? No other house had previously stood upon this site, no murder had ever been committed upon its grounds, and yet mysterious voices had been heard, mysterious sights seen by the good Patriarch and by other members of the family, and most inexplicable and distressing of all were the events that happened to Fragilia.

She had returned frail and delicate of body, it is true, but perfectly well and happy in the roseate dreams of maidenhood; when two weeks had passed the girl was a shadow of her former self, pale, haggard, with dragging step, lack-lustre eye, and an expression so piteous in its despair that it wrung the hearts of all who loved her.

The change had begun the day after her arrival at Giacomelli. Fragilia had risen early to gather flowers for the chapel altar, and her uncle had met her in the garden

with her arms full of lilies, her face flushed and radiant as when they talked together of Saint Antonio, for Fraglia was on her way to the spot where the good saint had granted her the vision of her future lover, and where she would kneel with him one day to repeat the sacred vows that would make them one.

She tripped lightly up the altar steps and was busily filling the alabaster vases when she chanced to glance upward at the altar-piece, the painting of Saint Antonio with the holy child and the stalk of lilies. Then the colour faded from her face, her own lilies slipped from her hands, and she sank to her knees, her fascinated eyes fixed upon the beautiful features of the saint.

For though the garb was that of a monk the long locks tonsured, and the face was thinner as from long vigils; the ecstatic eyes were the same that had thrilled her a year before, and she realised that the vision which she had seen was not that of an earthly lover but of Saint Antonio himself. Then, as a comprehension of what this signified dawned upon her,—that within two short weeks, not in her bridal robes but on her bier, she would wait for her blessing before that altar,—further consciousness left her. It was so that

her friends found her, lying on the crushed lilies, herself a flower wounded and broken beyond their power of healing.

She did not tell the cause of her trouble, and at first she fought against it with all the power she had. She was young to die, too young, in her sixteenth year. She would disregard the warning, and live, for life was so full of joy.

But though no known malady vexed her a fever of the mind wasted her frail form and subdued her spirit. She had danced incessantly on the night of her fête, welcoming each patrician youth as he was introduced to her with an eager questioning glance whose interest was quenched as instantly as the light of a candle blown out by a sudden gust. "Is she expecting some one?" her mother asked herself as she noted her daughter's alternations between excitement and depression.

"Were they all here?" Fragilia asked the next day, "all of your friends whom you wished me to meet?"

"All," her mother replied. The Giustini-ani brothers were the noblest born, unless it was the heir to the Vendramin estates, and what did Fragilia think of young Gonzaga who had ridden all the way from Mantua, or of Gianfrancesco Sforza of Milan?



VILLA GIACOMELLI
Ceiling by Paul Veronese

1700

It was evident that Fragilia thought nothing of them, nor did her father, the wise old senator, as he grumbled his objection to each one, and added: "No, they were not all here. Why did not Carletto come?"

"Carletto Caliarì? I did not ask him," the Signora stammered. "I feared he would feel out of place, perhaps be snubbed by some of our arrogant friends, and did not wish to submit him to the pain or humiliation."

"And who would dare insult him in my house?" roared Marcantonio Barbaro, "or who could desire to do so anywhere? Is not the heritage of genius as noble as that of rank? Carletto is not only the son of a great artist but he will himself be a greater, for he has all the technical skill of his father plus a grandeur of soul which my dear friend Paolo lacks."

Fragilia hardly listened to these praises. What did they signify to a girl who must die within a week? Her uncle noted her weariness. "Come with me Fragilia," he said, "you have not yet seen the frescoes with which our illustrious friend has adorned my apartment."

Daniele Barbaro offered his arm to his niece with the politeness of an old courtier and en-

sconced her in his own high-backed *sedilia* in the grand audience-chamber. Set in the table top before her was a mirror in which she could study without fatigue the superb ceiling. Voluptuous Venetian beauties, whose gold-wrought brocades and luscious velvets filled the spaces between the heavy gilded coverings with masses of indescribable colour,—peacock blues, swimming deliciously into the greens of corroded copper or flashing into rosy purples, formed the outer framework of the design; but the small central dome was lifted higher by the aërial perspective in which the Olympian deities from mighty Jove to mischievous Cupid disported themselves in the glorious abandon of the semi-nude.

Fragilia, lacking her uncle's connoisseurship, could not appreciate the artistic qualities in this decoration which made it an intoxication to the sense of seeing, but it filled her smaller cup to its brim of enjoyment as she naively admired Diana playfully imprinting a kiss on the nose of her favourite greyhound.

"You have your friends here, too," said her uncle, pointing to the *ringhiera* directly beneath the ceiling where leaning upon the balustrade of an encircling balcony Veronese

had depicted various members of the Barbaro family: Fragilia's mother, a high-bosomed stiffly corsetted dame, playing with the spaniel and the parrot, and on the other side a space where Beppo, the monkey, would appear later apparently pursued to his lofty position by Fragilia's two brothers.

"You are to be represented nearer to me," said Uncle Daniele, "on the wall behind you, near that panel where Paolo has already painted ——" But the good Patriarch did not finish nor did Fragilia hear his remark, for turning in the direction which he had indicated the girl beheld a miraculous vision. The solid wall had silently parted, as though the double leaves of some triptych had opened, and standing in that impossible doorway, his velvet cap doffed in ceremonious courtesy, deferentially pausing as though hesitating to startle her or to intrude, Fragilia saw again her spectral bridegroom. Then the room grew suddenly dark and she fell into her uncle's arms.

She was delirious all that night, but at day-break her mind cleared and she begged that her uncle might be summoned to hear her ominous experiences.

The old man listened thoughtfully to her

story of the apparitions of Saint Antonio, which though marvellous were not incredible to him.

“I, too, have heard mysterious voices and have seen strange sights in that very room,” he replied. “I pleased myself at first by fancying that they were vouchsafed me, in approbation of my researches, by that blessed saint, and I still believe that he has honoured me by his visits though they have been sorely afflicting. I have searched my conscience to realise in what manner I have transgressed, and find myself innocent unless it be in the matter of my intercession with the Holy Office for our friend, Paolo Caliarì. Saint Antonio was the friend of Saint Dominic, the scourge of heretics, and the founder of the inquisition. In his youth he bore not the sword in vain. I have perhaps erred through softness of heart. If so I have been justly punished, for on returning to my room I have more than once found the work of toilsome weeks crossed out, or my manuscripts torn in bits, and this when the doors of my apartment have been locked, and none could have entered, even supposing there had been any one in the villa who would have ventured to take such a liberty. Upon a certain other evening I fell asleep over my

work and was awakened by a voice uttering the most fearful maledictions. It was quite dark, so, though I started up and stared about me. I saw no one, nor heard I footsteps, but instead the beating of wings above my head.

"I am convinced that the imprecations were uttered by a spirit, but whether he were good or evil I cannot tell. To-day the most grievous of my trials has overwhelmed me, for the sermon of the blessed Saint Antonio has utterly disappeared. I fear that my well-intentioned labours have been too unworthily undertaken, that coming from me they are possibly acts of sacrilege, and that this is the meaning of the calamity which has fallen upon me in being bereft of a manuscript of such inestimable value, and one of which I was the guardian and not the owner, since it was borrowed from the archives of the University of Padua.

"But you, dear child, have no sin upon your conscience, and if indeed the holy saint has appeared to you it must have been in kindness to prepare you, as the good nuns taught you, either for life or for a felicity beyond our power of comprehension."

"I know it," wailed the terror-stricken girl, "but O my Uncle, compassionate as was the

look with which Saint Antonio regarded me, I cannot die. I have striven to reconcile myself, but I am wicked and rebellious, and my heart cries out for life, for life!"

"And verily you shall live, beloved child," declared her father, more worldly minded, hard headed, and practical than his brother. "Daniele may hold what converse he pleases with ghosts and goblins, saints and demons, but we entertain no such guests on this side of the villa. Believe that you saw the semblance of your future husband, if you must credit your convent fairy tales, and tell me what he is like that I may recognise my son-in-law."

"Nay, my Father, I thought as you upon his first appearance a year ago, but when I saw the portrait which now hangs above the altar I knew that I had seen its original."

"Sweet daughter," Marcantonio Barbaro objected, "that altar-piece was painted not from life by some contemporary artist but by my friend, Paolo Caliari. He makes use confessedly of models to aid his imagination, and the lineaments which he has so livingly depicted above the altar are doubtless those of some youth whom you may also have seen in the chapel a year since, for it was at that time that Paolo came to begin his work."



CHAPEL OF VILLA GIACOMELLI AT MASER
By Palladio



VILLA ARMENI, CONTARINI
By Gambara

- 4700

"Nay, nay," the girl cried passionately, "tell me not that I have been deceived, and that my saint is but some vulgar knave. I would rather die than be so shamed. Perchance our painter has been granted celestial visions like those of the blessed Fra Angelico. And how, if you are right, was it that I saw him but yesterday for the second time in my uncle's audience-chamber, when his valet swore that none but Uncle Daniele and myself had entered, standing, mark you this, my Father, *in an open door where no door is*, clothed in the same rich garb of a courtier, but with a mien nobler than that of any prince and a face so beautiful that all my heart went out to him in love ineffable?"

Then Marcantano Barbaro struck his thigh a resounding blow, for a greater revelation than had ever been granted his mystic brother now illumined his mental darkness. But though his features worked convulsively, and he could scarcely control his voice he said very gently: "Even were he all you describe he were not too good to mate with you. Rest now, beloved one, and on the morrow thy mother shall show thee all the finery with which she has stored thy marriage chest, for it is love, not death, that waits thee my Fragilia."

But the girl shook her head sadly, the obsession was too strong to be dispelled and she lay straight and still in her canopied bed like Saint Ursula in Carpaccio's picture, absorbed in celestial visions, not ecstatic but quiescent, resigned at last to the will of the blessed Saint Antonio. And on the morning preceding his festival she received a token that he had not forgotten her, for she was awakened by the overpowering perfume of lilies and the touch of something moist and cool and soft upon her eyelids. When she opened them there lay upon her breast a stalk of lilies but all cruelly broken and mangled as no lover of flowers or kind-hearted person could have maltreated them. And as she smoothed the crumpled petals a whim came to her to deck herself in her mother's bridal veil and jewelled tiara which the good Signora had brought the night before and left upon her simple dressing-table thinking to divert her mind with these gauds. But to Fragilia's surprise they had disappeared. Robing herself quickly she was about to seek her mother when she noticed that the corridor was strewn with broken lilies. The garden door was open and she hurried to it. No one was in sight, but all along the gravelled path lily petals were scattered in wantonness,

and she followed them wondering who could have so despoiled the stalks which stripped of their blossoms made such a piteous display within the borders.

The lilies led her to the chapel, and a strange force which seemed not her own impelled her to enter. And there, standing just where he had stood a year before, was the same mysterious visitant.

Fragilia walked to the altar rail, sank upon her knees, crossed her hands upon her breast, and meekly bent her head for he held in his extended hands the wedding-veil and crown.

To her surprise the saint did not bestow them upon her. There was silence for a little space, then raising her eyes she saw that the stranger had retreated to the sacristy door and stood respectfully waiting for her to finish her devotions. Suddenly he turned and there was a strange tumult within the sacristy, a scuffling, chattering, and whimpering, indignant reprimands, and sharp blows. Then from the open door Beppo bounded, and leaping to the altar plucked the lilies from the vases and threw them in rapid bombardment at his pursuer.

"Ah! Sacrilegious One! Imp of Satan!

Child of the Devil! if I but catch you I will wring your cursed neck!"

It was the incarnation of Saint Antonio who uttered these surprising words and who, having secured the monkey, now chastised him soundly before the aureoled portrait, which regarded the unsaintlike behaviour of its living presentment with beatific composure and even approval.

"These are doubtless your jewels, Signorina," the young man continued a very human note of vexation in his clear voice. "If you but knew the annoyance which this wretched little beast has given me you would not think it strange that your property is in my possession, and would pardon the hasty words which you have overheard."

With this the young man explained, what our readers have doubtless divined, that he was Carletto Caliori, the son, pupil and model of Paolo Veronese, for whom Fraglia's father had lately sent, professedly to complete various details in Veronese's decorations, and among others the portrait of this monkey who so little deserved the honour. For Beppo was addicted to most reprehensible practices which had been taught him by the mountebank, his

first master. He would pick pockets deftly, and climb into open windows returning with any small objects which he could lay his hands upon secreted within his tunic. When Carletto had first owned him gratitude had prompted Beppo to repay his new master's kindness in this equivocal way, and the young man was forced to make many an embarrassing explanation as he restored the articles stolen by his pet.

But by dint of persistent beating Beppo had become convinced of the error of his ways, and was apparently so thoroughly reformed that Paolo Veronese had not thought it necessary to make any mention of his former delinquencies to his new mistress. Nor had Beppo grown so fond of her as to desire to make her the recipient of his ill-gotten treasures, but the moment that he was aware that Carletto had arrived the monkey had rushed to his secret store-house and dragged thence various articles which he had carried to his benefactor's room and deposited at his feet, at the same time indicating by many expressive gestures that he wished to be followed. In the sacristy of the chapel Beppo had proudly displayed all his acquisitions hidden in a half-open

drawer, where he had chosen of late to sleep under some gold-embroidered vestments whose glitter had particularly pleased him.

Most valuable of the treasure-trove in whose restoration Fragilia now assisted was her uncle's precious manuscript, the sermon of Saint Antonio. It was because Beppo had the wit to note that it was dear to the good Patriarch that he watched his opportunity to filch it from the inlaid cabinet in which the sermon was carefully kept. The little creature was a pastmaster in mimicry as well as in theft, and later, his sittings as a model for Carletto having been interrupted by Fragilia's entrance, the roguish creature hopped to the Patriarch's sedilia, donned his skull-cap and, having decorated its rim with a chevaux-de-frise of goose-quills, trying one after another and then thrusting them into his hair as was the Patriarch's custom, he wrote and scribbled, sanded and tore up papers with a phrensy which was a capital imitation of the good prelate's moments of inspiration. It made clear the mysterious corrections of his manuscripts which had so distressed the good man, and the parrot from the top of the baldachino which canopied the sedilia (a perch which was afterwards ascer-

La Pia

From the painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, from a photograph
by J. Caswell Smith by permission of George Bell and Sons



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tained to be its favourite refuge) burst into such a torrent of execration as he spied Beppo that the celestial voices were also accounted for.

So merry did Daniele Barbaro become over these revelations that he wrote some lines of doggerel in Latin, entitled "*Jocoseria, or The Ghosts of Giacomelli*," of which, as they will add nothing to his fame as a churchman and a Latinist, we will endeavour to reproduce in translation merely the jingle and the temper of the closing stanza:

For in that Villa Barbaro
They nearly drove me crazy,
That parrot of Palladio
And ape of Veronese.

As to the after history of Fragilia and Carletto—surely it needs no telling, at least to those who have stood in the Patriarch's audience-chamber, where the bridegroom sent by Saint Antonio still greets the beholder with a gracious gesture in the non-existent doorway, and Fragilia, fragile no longer but plump and matronly, smiles at us benignly behind her fan from the great painter's delusive frescoes.



CHAPTER XIII

THE SCARLET SCARF

I

“The low, bleak tower, with naught save wastes
behind,
Stares down the abyss whereon chance reared and
nurst.
This type and likeness of the accurst man’s
mind—
The House Accurst.”

“I was years ago at Siena,” said the old
professor, “that the strange events which
I am about to relate began to befall me.”

I was a young man then and, though a
student, in no way interested in psychological
investigation or in occult phenomena. I had
come to Siena, like so many others, to witness
the running of the palio.

Why the Sienese should choose July for
these races Satan only knows, for the heat
simmers then in the crater’s cup in and about

which the city is built, the sky is burnished copper, and no breath of wind flutters between, and I had laboured under the mistaken impression that as Siena was a "hill-town" its atmosphere would invigorate me, and be the best possible preparation for a risky experience, the spending of the month of August in the Maremma.

I had recently been elected a fellow of an archæological society, and to qualify I needs must read a paper before it. I had determined upon my subject: *The Cinerary Vases of the Etruscans*. I would search not only the museums but the tombs of ancient Etruria; my camera should provide entertaining material for the stereopticon, and perchance I might stumble upon some important discovery.

There was a spice of danger in the programme which I had marked out for myself, for my foraging ground was the fever-haunted Maremma,—but that spice was for me the main attraction for, truth to tell, I cared very little for the Etruscans or for the mortuary pottery in which they chose to preserve their disregarded ashes.

The palio would be a much more entertaining experience than this perfunctory wander-

ing among tombs, and while waiting the great event Siena itself was a continual entertainment. Not alone the Siena of the present in its gala dress, but the Siena of Art and Romance with its tower of the Mangia shooting up like a lily-stalk above the grim old palaces. And of these the first in interest for the sake of the innocent and helpless victim of insensate jealousy and dastardly revenge who so long ago looked from its pointed windows is surely the Palazzo Tolomei,—most pitiful of all the creations of Dante's genius—"beautiful, poignant, slim figure of a young girl, carved immortal in one line: '*Siena mi fé, disfece mi Maremma.*'"

So Maurice Hewlett and his master before him wrote of La Pia, and as I stood before the prison-like palace against whose bars the gay little butterfly broke her wings, I was suddenly glad that I was to follow her to her exile and might perhaps find the malaria infected villa in the marshes "amid standing pools and tangled breadths of reed out of sight or call of man, where she than whom Siena had made nothing more fair, grew hollow-cheeked and filmy-eyed and very ready for Death when he had pity upon her."

But first the palazzo. It stands facing the



PALAZZO TOLOMEI AT SIENA

1960

small piazza of the same name, strong still and good for another seven hundred years, for those early masons built for eternity. Beautiful pointed gothic windows run across the two upper stories, each divided in the centre by a slender column with a lion's head above its cap and the upper part of its arch filled by trefoils. The two lower stories had originally been windowless, a fortress wall against the street riots of the rival clan of the Salimbeni, for these two factions once kept the city in a turmoil with their quarrels. The Guild of the Butchers was exclusively made up of members of the Tolomei family, and their adherents were as wealthy as the magnates of a beef trust of our own day; but the Salimbeni had the monopoly of the silk trade, and that the citizens of Siena were vainer and more extravagant in dress than they were gluttonous, the more magnificent palace of the Salimbeni still bears witness.

Time has subdued the once aristocratic habitation of the Tolomei to base uses, and two small shops on either side of its cavernous main entrance were surrounded by loungers of the lower classes, who grouped themselves in slouching attitudes as I attempted to photograph the degraded mansion. One brutal fel-

low, in especial filled me with repugnance as he elbowed himself to the front, standing with all the airs of proprietorship just beneath the iron grille which portcullis-like filled the upper portion of the arched doorway. He was slovenly in dress and gross in feature, bestiality was written on the heavy jowl and cruelty in the small pig-eyes. His rotund person was engirthed by a belt from which an object depended which I at first imagined to be a rapier, and as he folded his brawny arms upon his chest I noted that his blouse was stained with sanguinary spots. Taking offence, as it seemed to me, at my fascinated stare he retreated into one of the shops and presently appeared again brandishing a formidable knife which he proceeded to sharpen on the steel at his belt.

After all what was more appropriate than that a butcher should inhabit the palazzo of the Tolomei? And this was not the only circumstance to remind me of La Pia's tragic story.

I had just taken the cap from my camera when a casement opened beneath one of the pointed arches, and a girl's face showed itself, pale and clear-cut as a cameo against dark rippling hair. It was but an instantaneous

glimpse and the window-sash with its curtain of white net was banged to, shutterwise, but, whether by accident or design, a scarlet scarf which the girl had worn was caught in the closing window and hung fluttering, as though waved by hidden hands.

A youth's laugh rang out behind me and turning I was for a moment astonished to see a slim, handsome fellow in a fantastic theatrical costume of some by-gone period; green silken hose drawn tight over shapely legs, joining darker velvet trunks, and a doublet of orchid-tinted brocade stiff with gold embroidery of armorial devices. A small velvet cap cocked jauntily on a mop of curls above a peach-blossom, adolescent face topped the figure, altogether as exquisite a little fop as ever Folgore sang or Gozzoli painted—one of the "joyous companions," the *godereccia, spendereccia brigata* of Dante.

Out of the canvas of what *quattrocentist* had he stepped, I asked myself, when a woman's voice from the palace window cried "Bravo, Bruco!" and I bethought me that it was the eve of the palio, when the jockeys, the heralds, the standard-bearers, and pages blossom forth in all the splendour of some mediæval tournament. "Bruco," the worm I be-

thought me as I marked the green silkworms embroidered on his breast, and remembered how in La Pia's time young Raphael Salimbeni, "beautiful as his patron saint and a terror among girls," had ridden in the palio for his *contrada* until some unknown avenger had "cleared that viper's nest of a heart with a dagger."

"Ah!" thought I, "the old drama is being re-enacted, but why must the angel-faced little demon choose the wife of his deadliest enemy as the object of his compromising devotion?" Then I recalled myself fully to modernity by the reflection that probably no Tolomei had lived in that house for centuries, and it was doubtful whether this youth had ever heard of the ancient feud between the families.

I entered one of the little shops, not the butcher's, for I could not persuade myself to speak to that repulsive animal, and I glanced about for something to purchase which might prove the entering wedge for conversation. A pretty girl who seemed to have divined my intention immediately offered me a box of "Tolomei cigarettes."

"They are made," she explained, "from a recipe found among old papers in this palazzo."

"And doubtless," I replied derisively, "La Pia smoked them at her villa in the Maremma to keep off the mosquitoes."

"Doubtless, Signora," the girl acquiesced smilingly.

"Unfortunately," I laughed, "tobacco was not imported into Europe until centuries after La Pia's day, and even if she could have used these cigarettes they were hardly to be vaunted on that account, since she died of malaria."

"Perhaps," the girl replied mysteriously, "that is a plausible explanation, but there are other ways in which one may die if one has a jealous husband."

"And as to tobacco," remarked a benevolent-looking priest in a skiff-shaped hat, who had dropped in for his two cents' worth of snuff and who now paused with a pinch half way to his nose, "there need have been none in the formula. The Tolomeis were descended from the Ptolemys, that race of ancient Egyptian kings. The Signor is doubtless aware that modern Egyptian cigarettes are manufactured from opium hashish and Heaven knows what un-Christian materials. I have even heard that in the neighbourhood of the tombs, the decayed wood of mummy coffins, rags of mummy shrouds,

mummy spices, and even mummy dust are used to produce that blend so admired by connoisseurs. The Tolomeis may have brought with them a shipload of their embalmed ancestors when they emigrated to Italy. It is quite possible that they inhaled the fumes of their dissolving elements believing that thus they gave their *spiritus* reincarnation in their own bodies."

"No one can quite understand your theories Father 'Tolo,'" laughed the cigarette vender, "but there is certainly something odd about these cigarettes. An artist who once bought them has written me that La Pia appeared to him in England and sat to him for her portrait and he sent me a photograph of the picture."

"What was this artist's portrait like?" I asked.

"A tall slim girl, Signor, not at all the Sienese type, with long crinkled hair, oh! very long and crinkled. She must have used hundreds of crimping pins. It is an odd picture; the Signor shall see it for himself."

I uttered an exclamation of surprise, for the photograph which the girl placed before me was a reproduction of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's famous picture then unknown to me, but

I was not so much moved by the unearthly beauty of that death-struck face as by the fact that it was precisely the one of which I had been granted a vision. "I have seen her!" I cried excitedly, "only a few moments since in the third story of this house at the third window from the right from which she was kind enough to wave a scarf as she caught my eye."

"Ah! the Signor has then no need of the cigarettes. That was indeed La Pia's window, but no one has looked from it for many a year. It is in the *appartamento nobile* of the palace which the proprietor is unable to rent. If the Signor will accompany me I will show it to him."

Pocketing the cigarettes I followed the girl as she unlocked door after door leading me through suites of unfurnished darkened rooms to the one in whose window I had seen the cameo profile. Our feet left prints in the thick dust as we crossed it, the air was stuffy, as in an apartment long shut up, and there were heavy iron bars across the windows, the hasps so rusted that use what strength we could, neither my guide nor I nor our combined force could open them. There were no curtains at the sashes and no scarlet scarf. Nor indeed was there any sign of either as I

looked back at the palace after crossing the square. It was clearly therefore a case of hallucination.

The next morning, that of the races, dawned clear. The entire city was up early and in a hubbub of excitement, for not its dwellers alone were agog to see the palio but some twenty thousand peasants were swarming its narrow streets. I managed to wedge myself into one of the parish churches and witnessed the blessing of the horse of the *contrada* of the Sheep, a vicious little pony which plunged and kicked as it was led up the aisle to the imminent danger of the women who crowded about him. But if the horse were an ugly creature the *fantino* (jockey) was infinitely more so. I have rarely seen a more depraved face. Close beside him and in earnest conversation was the butcher of the Tolomei palace—some important personage for the day, for he was tricked out in a suit of antique armour. I heard nothing of their conversation, but I saw the gleam of gold pieces passing from the great hand into the claw of the jockey, and it struck me at the time that this largess boded no good. "He is bribing him to lose the race," was my first thought, but in this surmise I was utterly mistaken.

The race was to be run in the public square at the foot of the tower of the Mangia, which has witnessed the scene through so many centuries. No more inconvenient or dangerous race-course could have been chosen, for the space is contracted, steep, and paved with cobble stones; moreover at one end there is a wickedly sharp turn, of which more hereafter. I had taken a seat on the stand built against the fronts of the houses near the Fonte Gaia which gave me an excellent view of the entry of the procession. A band of musicians led the way, followed by heralds and the seventeen standard bearers all in gorgeous historical costumes performing feats with their ensigns which would have made a drum-major green with envy. The wind unrolled and flapped the flags showing the whimsical devices of the Tortoise, Forest, Panther, Snail, Wave, Eagle, Tower, Shell, Unicorn, Owl, Goose, Giraffe, Wolf, Hedgehog, Sheep, and lastly the Worm. These were followed by various resplendent personages, and floats representing the Caroccio or battle-car of the Florentines which the Sienese captured at the battle of Monteperto, and lastly the rival *fantini* each armed with his murderous *nerbo* or whip of ox-sinew.

The prize, a white satin banner, embroidered in gold with the wolf emblem of Siena, was set up on the judge's stand, and the bare-backed horses of the contestants were led into position amid frantic cheering and waving of handkerchiefs. A scarlet scarf nervously agitated by some one in the tier of seats behind me fluttered across my eyes and brushed my throat which it partly encircled. The material, cashmere with fine gold thread in the fringe, gave me a peculiarly unpleasant tingling sensation, like that of a mild electric shock and at the same time I was aware of a strange penetrating odour, as though the scarf had lain long in a sandal-wood box with attar of roses and other Oriental perfumes. I brushed it aside and turned quickly only to confront the smiling priest. "A thousand apologies, Signor," he said, "the wind filliped my handkerchief across your face. I will be more guarded in my cheering in future."

The handkerchief was spread across his knees, an immense affair of red silk disgustingly redolent of snuff. I gave the good man's apology curt acknowledgment, for at that instant a report of a gun, the signal for the start rang out, and all seventeen of the horses and riders were off in a flash of dazzling colour.

The course was three times around the piazza. At the first turn, in front of the Archives, five of the gallant horsemen tumbled over each other in a struggling, plunging mass of confusion, and the contestants behind them were so delayed that they were forced to drop out of the race.

The police rushed in and cleared the track, but there was an ominous pool of red to be sanded before the four more fortunate jockeys again came tearing recklessly down the incline flogging their own horses and their nearest rivals with their cruel thongs. On this second round the horses of the *contradas* of the Worm and the Sheep were in advance flying nearly neck and neck, the jockey of the Sheep plying his *nerbo* maliciously. As they passed me his lash cut across the face of the handsome *fantino* of the Worm, and the blood spurted from his cheek. A woman behind me shrieked, and turning I saw a slim, girlish figure standing upon the seat recently occupied by the priest excitedly waving a scarlet scarf. In another instant she had sunk upon the bench, pulled down by her escort, the butcher of the Palazzo Tolomei still in his helmet, with the nodding plumes. I could not see the girl's face for she hid it upon his shoulder, and now

her shriek was echoed by every woman and by many a man in that vast concourse, for as the two leading contestants were nearing the critical turn on the final round the jockey of the Sheep rose in his stirrups and, with his thong twisted as a noose, lassoed his rival, the galliard jockey of the Worm about the neck, and jerked him sharply backward. His horse whirled around upon his hind legs and fell upon its rider. It seemed inevitable that the offending jockey must also go down, but the trick had evidently been practised before, for his horse cleared the struggling obstacle, grazed his master's leg slightly against the barrier, but came up the track in good form, and shouts of "Bravo, Moutone!" rent the air as the judge handed the jockey the gold embroidered banner.

I fixed my opera-glass upon the green and lavender spot at the far end of the track until I saw it lifted from the ground and carried from the piazza, its arms about the shoulders of two supporting friends.

Then, as the reaction from the suspense made me slightly faint, I lighted a cigarette, and at that instant a cold little hand touched my cheek. It was that of the girl who had waved the scarf, who had fainted and was be-

ing carried from the arena by the burly butcher. Her arm trailed limp from the shoulder and the hand had touched me quite by accident, but I shivered as I recognised the cameo-white profile against the dishevelled rippling hair.

I had, however, no feeling of anything supernatural in the incident. The cigarette-seller must have led me to the wrong floor of the palace. This girl was some relative of the butcher's, who had shown her face at another window than the one I had seen bolted. I was more concerned as to the fate of the jockey who had been so foully dealt with. He must be seriously injured I thought, but I saw him the next night at the open-air supper given by the victorious *contrada*. Lanterns had been festooned across the narrow street, and the long table, stretching for seventy feet, groaned with meat, macaroni, bread, sweetmeats, fruit, and wine. Wine in especial flowed in profusion,—great wicker-covered flasks of Chianti with necks a yard long braided with gay ribbons,—and mutton roasted on the spit, seethed, baked, or fried did honour to the insignia of the *contrada*.

Apparently placated for his rough handling the jockey of the Worm sat an honoured guest

at the left of my acquaintance, the priest, but his right arm was in splints, and the sling which held it, crossing his breast conspicuously, was a scarlet scarf. It chanced that I was given the seat beside him, and I found that by an odd coincidence he bore the name of Raphael Salimbeni, the jockey who flourished in La Pia's life-time and whose victories among ladies were even more famous than in the field of the palio.

Having complimented his dare-devil riding and condoled his misfortunes, we became, after several glasses of Montepulciano, very familiar and friendly. He understood English, too, which made our remarks more confidential than they would otherwise have been. A bright-eyed *contadina* was signalling to him in a flattering manner from across the table but he gave her scant attention, and I ventured to touch his scarf and remark, "The little lady who gave you this is not here this evening."

"No, Signor," he replied, and a smile which was not altogether pleasant played about his lips. "Her people are absurdly suspicious. They have sent her to their villa. My engagements for the season are over; I shall myself leave the city before long," and he smiled again suggestively and contemptuously.

"Did you ever read the poems of William Morris," I asked with apparent irrelevance.

"No, Signor, would you recommend me to do so?"

"There is one poem entitled *The Blue Closet*, which you might find interesting," I replied. "A girl is waiting the coming of her lover, who is dead. She, in some occult way, is aware of this, for she says,—and these are the only lines of the poem which I remember:

Did they strangle him as he lay there
With the long scarlet scarf I used to wear?

Only I pray the Lord let him come here,
Both his soul and his body to me are most dear,
Dear Lord that loves me I wait to receive
Either body or spirit this wild Christmas Eve.

He laughed, but turned a little pale.
"You English are fond of ghosts," he said,
"but I fancy that my Bella would hardly care
to see mine."

I never saw him in the flesh again, but the next day as I developed my negatives I found La Pia's face distinct though so minute that it was necessary to use a magnifying glass to bring out the features in the photograph which I had taken of the façade of the palazzo. I took a print to the cigarette-seller as a proof that she had led me wrong, but she was vexa-

tiously near-sighted and persisted that there was no face at the window, which opened from the room which she had showed me.

When I told her of the incident at the races she crossed herself: "Holy Virgin, there is more in those cigarettes than I thought. My neighbour, the butcher, left the city the day before the palio. He has not attended the races for ten years, since the day that his wife ran away with one of the jockeys. If the girl behind you was La Pia then the man who carried her out was the ghost of her husband."

"There was no such man behind the gentleman," replied the ubiquitous priest, "and no woman in that tier. I occupied the aisle seat and the others were filled the entire afternoon by the boys of my boarding-school."

"Sir," I exclaimed, "do you mean to tell me that you were there when the accident, if you are indulgent enough to call it so, occurred to Raphael Salimbeni, just before the finish?"

"Raphael Salimbeni?" he inquired wonderingly.

"Certainly," I replied, "the jockey of the Silkworm to whom you introduced me at the banquet last evening, and who sat between us."

"My dear sir," replied the priest very gravely, "I sat through the races to the finish.

There was no accident such as you describe and no *fantino* dressed in green and lavender. Moreover the *contrada* of the Silkworm was abolished in the fourteenth century, when its jockey and others rebelled against the decision of the judges. Its emblem has never been displayed at any succeeding palio. As to the chair between us at last night's supper, it was empty. You talked to yourself toward the end of the evening, and I was surprised, remarking that you drank very little. But you smoke too much, Signor. Cigarettes are vile stuff, let me recommend snuff," and he offered his box politely.

"I rarely smoke," I replied stiffly. "One cigarette can scarcely have affected my brain," but even as I spoke my head spun and I became unconscious.

II

An old red castle strong with stony towers,
The windows gay with many coloured glass,
Wide plains and rivers flowing among flowers
That bathe the castle basement as they pass.

In antique weed with dark eyes and gold hair,
A lady looks forth from her window high;
It may be that I knew and found her fair
In some forgotten life long time gone by.

GERARD DE NEURAL.

It was the effect of the heat, so the physi-

cian told me, for my seat at the palio had been on the sunny side of the piazza, and an attack of this kind sometimes develops gradually.

I lay ill for two weeks in Siena consumed with a feverish impatience to get to my work, my researches among the tombs of Etruria, and at length, quite against the advice of my doctor I took the night train for Grosseto.

The heat had been intense, but shortly after the profile of Monte Amiata showed itself against the sunset, a western breeze sprang up bringing moist whiffs of the sea, and a delicious coolness took the place of the hitherto stifling atmosphere of the railway carriage. We had descended from the hills and entered the Maremma, vast stretches of forest standing for the most part deep in bogs, and a white sea of mist to which the moonlight gave a spectral character filled the intervening plains. The train stopped at some station whose name I had not remarked, and I noticed beyond the straggling village fronting the northern hills a mass of picturesque ruins with one low tower in which a light burned red in the surrounding blackness.

"What place is this?" I asked of the guard as he slammed to the doors. "Castello Pietra," he replied, and I sat up suddenly wide

awake with the comprehension that this was the lonely villa where Pia Tolomei had been sent to die of malaria. So possessed was I to know more, all that could be known of her mysterious taking off that acting upon the impulse of the moment I tossed out my bag and followed it with a flying leap just as the train was moving off.

I regretted doing so immediately, for the village was at a distance from the station, and it was nearly midnight. The station-master, who was to remain for a later train, was the only person in sight. He took my bag in charge and showed me the road to the village, which was evident enough in the light of the full moon, and lighting one of the Tolomei cigarettes as a protective against the mosquitoes, which swarmed in myriads, I strode briskly forth upon my unknown way. I had not noticed that any one else had alighted from the train, but presently I thought that I heard following footsteps. Looking back I could see no one and concluding that I must have been mistaken, I splashed doggedly on through the puddles and mire. The Eucalyptus trees, which the good friars had planted on either side of the road, had not succeeded in sucking up the deadly miasma which lurked

in the swamps on either hand, and the wreaths of blue mist in the glamour of the moonlight seemed to be floating figures circling in some spectral dance.

Presently the regular splashing tramp made itself once more plainly heard and, wheeling suddenly, I caught sight for a moment of the figure of a burly man, shambling, I might almost say skulking, along the shady side of the road.

The rows of trees ended at a little distance from me, and I waited to see the man come out into the full moonlight, but while I waited the footsteps ceased and the figure grew more and more undefined gradually blending into the waving tree shadows until I lost it entirely. Had the man been sucked into emptiness, had he crouched in the ditch, or had there been no man?

I shrugged my shoulders and went on, listening acutely, but now there was no sound of any follower. I came presently to a turning, the road to the village was unmistakably the one to the right but to the left an avenue led alluringly to the Villa Pietra. Again that mysterious attraction too strong for my resistance dominated my will and I turned into the villa avenue. A light burned in one of the

windows and showed me the way. As I approached I heard the faint strumming of some small stringed instrument, mandolin or lute, or was it the louder insistent humming of the mosquitoes which whirled about me in cohorts, though the smoke of my cigarette kept them at a safe distance.

The tinkle died away as I approached the villa. I saw that the lodge gate was ajar, and that the light which I had noticed from a distance shone from the window of a room directly facing it and opening upon the terrace. The interior, distinctly illumined, was that of a lady's boudoir tapestried in verdurous patterns and tints with dark oaken cabinets and chests against the dull green background. The light was not that of a lamp but a flame flickering in a brazier which emitted clouds of blue smoke, like that of incense, and presently as the lady fed it with powder from a casket a smoke-wreath floated from the open window and I inhaled the mysterious aroma made familiar by the Tolomei cigarettes.

It was indeed the La Pia that Rossetti painted, who now seated herself beside the window waiting from long habit but in utter hopelessness for the rescuer who would never come. Suddenly she rose and stretched out

her arms toward me. Did she see me? Was it to me that she had waved her scarf? For me that she was waiting? I ran forward and tripping mercifully over some obstacle fell only two steps from the moat which bathed the foot of the castle. As I lay on its brink I distinctly heard again the twanging of the mandolin and light tripping footsteps, then suddenly others heavier, a crashing through branches, a struggle, a splash, and a sinister, gurgling cry. I sat up horrified.

Had the phantom serenader met his death at the hands of my mysterious follower? I peered into the black water but could discern nothing upon its surface but a long, waving scarlet line, presumably the reflection of the light from the window.

La Pia was moving composedly about. She had not heard the sounds which alarmed me, and she presently took from a carved marriage chest a wedding-veil of richly wrought lace. She brought it spread wide in her hands to the window, and calmly fastened it to the inner framing. It was simply a prosaic precaution against mosquitoes, laughably unromantic and unspectral, and excepting for its exquisite material and ornamentation the lace netting was exactly what might have

been expected at such a time and in such a place

La Pia had extinguished the flame in the brazier and had glided away from the window, and, ashamed of my involuntary spying, I was just about to rise when a man brushed by me, so closely that I distinctly heard his heavy breathing, and a little jingling sound which I presently recognised as the metallic rustle of linked armour. I cannot say that I was so much surprised as alarmed to recognise the butcher of the Tolomei palace (or was it his mysterious prototype of the races?) in the man who now crouched at my side and then vanished for an instant, reappeared on the other side of the moat and, supporting himself by clinging to the vine, clambered toward the window. He paused when he had reached it to draw a dagger from its sheath, and the shriek of warning, which I was about to utter, died upon my lips as I wonderingly saw him cut two long slashes crosswise in the net which screened the window. Then replacing his knife he retreated as he had come, his stealthy footsteps dying away in the distance. The tatters of the ruined veil flapped softly in the night breeze, and the mosquitoes swarmed through the opening.

Their humming sang itself into words in
my brain half lullaby, half serenade.¹

Our slumber song is the sweetest
When at night unveiling our wings
We tune our lutes in staccato,
And strum on our fairy strings,
Zim, ze zim, ze zim.

We swarm through the open casement,
We float in the lamplight's ring,
And fan your feverish eyelids
With the fluff of a gauzy wing.

A myriad murderous banditti.
In the slime of the fountain's rim
We have poisoned our slender stilettoes,
While chanting this sinister hymn—

“Sleep soft in the mid-summer moonlight
Recking naught of crime or alarms
While the mist of the ghostly Maremma
Wraps its shroud round thy innocent charms.
Zim, ze zim, ze zim!”

I rose unsteadily and tottered to the
principal door of the villa. The drawbridge
hung in mid-air, and the moat was wider
here than elsewhere. I shouted, but could
arouse no one. For hours I tramped back
and forth a self-appointed sentry. No one
heard or observed me, and when the moonlight
paled into the grey morning twilight I was
still making my rounds, haggard, almost ex-

¹ *Song of the Mosquitoes of the Maremma*, by E. Frère Champney.

hausted, my clothing covered with mud and sodden with mist, my brain burning with fever and my body racked with pain. It was a miracle that I had not been drowned, for stagnant pools had spread from the moats and turned the undrained meadows into lily-ponds, covered with a coppery green slime, and murmurous with the confused hum of myriads of insects.

The villa stood islanded above this expanse of shallow reed-grown water, only a narrow causeway ran from the highway to its entrance and along the outer border of the moat, where I had kept my insane watch all night. A glance at the ruined villa in the full light of day showed me that it was not only uninhabited but uninhabitable.

It lacked roof and floors and stairways. Only the walls rose darkly, heavily tapestried within and without by luxuriant vines. A great rift from turret to foundation gave me an unobstructed view of the interior of the room where I had fancied that I saw La Pia. Its only tenants were a few ravens who presently flew, cawing through a low window on the opposite side. It was the window which La Pia had draped with her bridal veil, and which her husband had slashed to let in

the mosquitoes, and as I gazed across the interval it seemed to me that it was still hung with filmy lace. I ran around to the other side of the villa, where I had seen this strange drama enacted. The window was curtained from top to bottom by a mass of spider webs, in delicate wheel-like patterns, strung with beads of moisture which sparkled with prismatic colours in the morning light, and across which scuttled the largest and most loathly spiders which I have ever seen. While I stared a raven whizzed straight through the centre of this curtain and I saw that the gossamer lace was cut through the middle, as sharply and evenly as though it had been just done by a knife, by a double cross-shaped gash!

I sank down upon the wet grass with a shiver. How much of what I had seen was real, how much delirium? The water in the moat gurgled gently with a sobbing sound. Was this what I had mistaken for Raphael Salimbeni's death agony? I crept nearer and looked into its depths and saw the waving crimson streamers of some aquatic plant, but in the centre of the swirling scarf-like folds I recognised, though ghastly white, with starving maniac eyes and every feature distorted by mental and physical anguish—my own face!



CHAPTER XIV

HOMELESS GHOSTS AND HAUNTED HABITATIONS

I

WITH DANTE AND BOCCACCIO

ALL old houses should be haunted, if not by well-authenticated spectres seen at intervals by simple, superstitious people, at least by traditions of some drama enacted within their walls, handed down credulously by father to son, and retold on the spot by a grey-haired guardian in the gathering twilight.

Under such circumstances, though the narrator be a raconteur of no especial talent and the tale improbable, the ghosts will walk, not alone fearsome apparitions which freeze the blood of the spectator or those equally unpleasant lachrymose ladies who wring their hands and sob; but merry and tricky sprites as well who find no heaven so enjoyable as

the scenes of their happy lives, and return to amuse themselves and us with shadow-pantomimes of vanished joys.

Such ghosts are always hospitable and garrulous, glad to share their haunts with an appreciative guest and to explain to him confidentially exactly where and how it all happened.

A few of their romance-haunted villas we have visited together, others which the author has regretfully abandoned as "unhaunted habitations," since no legend concerning their former occupants has rewarded her eager search, may be found by a more favoured guest tenanted by some shy spirit who will break the seal of long kept silences.

Countless others, for which the dimensions of the present volume would scarcely suffice as a gazetteer, await our exploration. In the environs of Florence alone there are over five hundred villas, many of which would repay study. Some have been the homes of distinguished men, and in not a few the unreal legendary owners move with such vividness that they are more like the brilliant figures in a camera obscura than shy ghosts. Many of these villas are so palatial, so famous, that to omit mention of them seems unpardonable.

Such are Villa Spence, formerly a Medicean villa, filled with associations and priceless relics; Villa Stibbert with its magnificent collection of antiques; San Donato, the palazzo of the Demidoffs; Villa di Rusciano, built by Brunelleschi and Villai Colazzi by Michael Angelo; Villa Salviati with its legend of the murderess, Duchess Veronica, and the grand Villa Corsini with its traditions of Robert Dudley. There are also Villa Fabricotti, the favourite residence of Queen Victoria, entrancing Majano, once the home of the Pazzis, and castelated Vincigliata. One wonders in the villa last mentioned if the ghosts of the bandit Manzeccas, who steeped with tragedy the stronghold whose ruins Mr. Leader has so painstakingly restored, deign to occupy their new premises. They must be foolishly fastidious if they do not, for the mediævalism of those machicolated walls is so well imitated as to deceive even one to the manor born.

Of Florentine villas associated with famous men one of the most striking in appearance is the Villa dell Ombrellino from whose tower, surmounted by an iron cock, Galileo watched the stars. Adjoining its grounds is the Villa Bellosguardo of Guido Cavalcanti whom Dante honoured as *primo de mei amici*, and on

the other side of the hill is Villa Montauto where Hawthorne wrote *Transformation*. The Villa Il Fusino, formerly the home of Walter Savage Landor, where Leigh Hunt wrote his sonnets, now enshrines an invaluable collection of Petrarch's manuscripts. Its grounds are also notable in that the Affrico, the little stream so dear to Boccaccio, flows through them and formed for the ladies of the *Decameron* the bathing pool which Boccaccio thus describes:

"A rivulet trickled down steep rocks, making a sound delightful to hear, while the spray seemed to be living silver broken into the lightest of showers." At the foot of this waterfall the stream widened into "a lakelet in which the ladies, having no fear of being seen, decided to bathe, and all disrobed and went down into the water which hid their lovely white bodies no more than a thin glass would hide a crimson rose."

There are two other villas at Fiesole where

Boccaccio's fair brigade

Beguiled the hours and tale for tale repaid.

and of all literary landmarks in the vicinity of Florence the dearest to the majority of pilgrims are the villas associated with Dante and Boccaccio. We have not only those made

famous as the stage setting of the *Decameron* but the authenticated homes of the two authors, and if we choose to make these shrines our starting point we have before us a pilgrimage of unfailing fascination, and one which will lead us far afield, for both Dante and Boccaccio found their heroes and heroines in their wanderings.

The pages of the *Divine Comedy* teem with these alluring spectres. Somewhere in beautiful Italy they once lived, for Dante's characters are historical, and he gives us such precise data, that we can track them to their palaces, villas, or castles; and there is no hunt for any quarry whatsoever so rich in reward as this.

Boccaccio's tales, though usually regarded as fictional, are many of them, gossipy anecdotes, possibly a trifle malicious (and they lose no zest on this account), concerning personages whom he may have personally known; while others, long handed down by tradition, had their genesis in some actual occurrence and locality whose identification is possible.

True we shall find some of their heroines *homeless ghosts* who beckon us mischievously a little distance and then fade into the garish light of day. Often when we fancy that we

have suitably and comfortably housed such a vagrant, lo, some meddling wiseacre turns on the "search-light of history," and our timid ghost flies out of the window, but in such cases the pleasure of the hunt is its sufficient reward.

It is easy and pleasant to follow the writers themselves, as they wandered from their beloved Florence, making each halt a shrine for our pilgrimage and leaving in each some precious clue to aid us in threading the labyrinth of the enchanted wood to the hidden bower where they first discovered the characters which we had fancied that they created. Dante's home at the time that he was banished was a villa at Fiesole, on the old road from Florence. It is now known as the Villa Bondi, from the name of its present owner, who has surrounded it with flower-beds and filled it with works of art. But though these adornments were lacking in Dante's time documentary evidence proves incontestably that the villa was his. Another interest also adheres to it, for Dante made over the estate to his brother, Francesco Alighieri, in consideration of two hundred and five golden florins, more useful to him in his exile than landed property near Florence, and Francesco sold it almost

immediately to Giovanni and Accerito Portinari, nephews of that Beatrice who was Dante's early love and later inspiration. Each sale is attested, and a heraldic representation of a gate,—the arms of the Portinaris, who were keepers of one of the gates of Florence,—is carved upon the well in the villa court-yard. It was fitting that Dante's home should pass to the family of Beatrice, for it was probably while pacing its loggia or the terrace with the entrancing view toward Vallombrosa that he mused of his first meeting with her and wrote the sonnet beginning

So noble and so modest doth appear
My Lady when she greets me with her smile.

Dante makes Cacciaguida give the itinerary of his exile, telling in the form of a prophecy how he fled first to Bartolommeo della Scala, whose palace is still shown at Verona.

Thine earliest refuge and thine earliest inn
Shall be the mighty Lombard's courtesy,
Who on the ladder bears the holy bird.

It was here, too, that he tells us how salt in spite of that hospitality he found

The bread of others, and how hard a road
The going up and down another's stairs.

We may trace Dante's footsteps to Bologna, Padua, and Lungiana, thence to Paris and, if

we choose to believe the tradition, to Germany, Flanders, and England, and back again through many a north Italian town to Venice, Rimini, and finally to Ravenna.

Ever and always he was collecting the material for his great work. Everywhere he saw ghosts, for, as Maurice Hewlett has well said: "he is the maker because he is the seer, gifted with the inner vision of the heart of them all: the well of tears, the pit of shame and sin, and the leaping fire of love; and of all the gifts in the world meet for travellers this one of Dante's of romantic apprehension is the most precious."

The student of Dante cannot fail in some measure to share this gift. La Pia's grim palace in Siena and her lonely villa in the Maremma matched with those "seven most lovely wailing lines ever penned by man," will strike his heart with the same intolerable pang of pity that they did that of Swinburne.¹

¹The great trees near the castle swing
In the sad-coloured evening:
"Ricorditi de me che son
La Pia,"—that small sweet word alone
Is not yet gone.

"Ricorditi di me" the sound,
Stole out of deep dumb days remote
Across the fiery and fatal ground,
Comes tender as a hurt bird's note

The tower of Ezzelino in Padua with its grisly secrets will seem less unreal to one familiar with the *Inferno* than to others; and Cunizza and Sordello will flit about the ruins of the castle of San Bonifazio even as they did before Dante's eyes when he walked in Verona, and passing from his imagination to that of Browning evoked the most ambitious of his poems.

The sense of kinship, at least in feeling, with great writers who have been disciples of Dante, gives a certain harmless exaltation to the pleasure which we experience in finding that they too have been followers in Dante's track, and is like the unexpected meeting with old friends in strange places, and will repay us for some disappointments.

We must not hope to identify all the buildings in which Dante has interested us.

The Tower of Famine, which bore witness

To where, a ghost with empty hands,
A woe-worn ghost, her palace stands
In the mid city, where the strong
Bells turn the sunset air to song
And the towers throng.

Love made me of all things fairest thing
And Hate unmade me: this knows he
Who with God's sacerdotal ring
Enrined my hand espousing me.

so long to the most insupportably realistic of his scenes of horror, is gone at last from Pisa; but the castle of Poppi is still one of the most fascinating buildings in the Cassentino, and throngs of tourists are here shown the bed-chamber of "the good Gualdrada" who have no idea how she earned Dante's commendation.¹

We may not care to search for the convent from which Piccarda Donati "the eternal Pearl" was snatched, or to linger at Pistoia in the house of Selvaggia Vergiolesi, who inspired in Dante's fellow-poet, Cino, the only love-poem which can rival his own to Beatrice. Even Gemma Donati, Dante's wife, may waken in our hearts but a mild interest. These and many more are negligible, but there are two women, Francesca da Rimini and Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, who can not be disregarded by the traveller, not alone for the reason that their castles and palaces are of such unusual interest but because their histories haunt our memories with such all-compelling vividness and charm.

Francesca in a certain way came into Dante's personal history. She was his contem-

¹ Dante himself neglects to tell us why in two words he made her immortal, and it is Sansvino who relates her story which Roscoe has translated in his *Tales from Italian Novelists*.

porary, almost an acquaintance, and as we stand beside Dante's tomb in Ravenna we find ourselves facing her early home. Dante's final refuge was the court of Francesca's uncle, Count Guido da Polenta, of Ravenna; and Francesca's birthplace, and residence until her marriage to Gianciotto Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, was this same Polenta palace which only a few years later sheltered Dante.

Dante came very close to poor Francesca in this home of her childhood for he heard her story at first hand, fresh from the lips of her indignant relatives.

The ancestral palace of the Polentas is severe and prison-like. A tablet on its façade tells us

"Questa casa fu un tempo dei Polentani, che ebbero la gloria di accogliere ospitalmente Dante Alighieri."

Dante died here, and his daughter, Beatrice, lived for many years in Ravenna. An inscription on the convent of Santo Stefano states, that she devoted herself to God being "wroth with the world's wickedness, having seen her father through the evil dissension of citizens condemned to perpetual exile and to become a beggar for the bread of strangers."

They will show you in the *Pineta*, Dante's

walk beside the canal under the stone-pines, "the gentle and windless shade" of which he writes. He doubtless knelt in the church of Santa Maria in Porto Fuori and possibly watched the painting of the frescoes, executed about this time by the order of Francesca's uncle, but now faded to ashes of roses, which include among their figures the one which in spite of its archaic characteristics so touched Arthur Symonds: "The calm and eager face of Francesca da Rimini; the bright gold hair wreathed with green leaves, the long neck, the long sensitive hands, the long, straight line of nose and forehead and the wide eyes looking down from an open window as if for the first sight of Paolo."

It is the face of Eleanora Duse, however, which haunts us as we visit the real scene of the tragedy, the Rocca, or ancient castle of the Malatestas at Rimini, and the memory of the passionate cadences of her voice which thrills through its silence. It is D'Annunzio's prodigal imagination with its mastery of expression, its wealth of colour and imagery which resurrects the jostling throng of courtiers, soldiers, and feudatories of the misshapen and malignant Malatesta who crowd those empty halls. It is his brutality which

beats down the door of Francesca's bower which Dante's fine reserve left closed permitting her to tell us only:

One day we read for pastime and sweet cheer
Of Launcelot, how he found Love tyrannous.
Our eyes were drawn together reading thus
Full oft, and still our cheeks would paler glow,
But one sole point it was that conquered us,—
For when we read of that great lover, how
He kissed the smile which he had longed to win—
Then he, whom nought can sever from me now
For ever, kissed my mouth all quivering.
A Galahad was the book, and he that writ,
Upon that day we read no more therein.¹

In spite of her frailty, perhaps in consequence of it, Francesca is of all Dante's characters the dearest to the popular heart. Our guide affirmed, that late one evening he had seen a lady habited in red and gold brocade fitting the keys on her long jewelled chatelaine to the lock of one of the doors. She glided to a little distance as he approached and he was surprised to find the door which he had left unfastened securely locked. As she walked quickly away when he called to her to open the door he followed, and she passed out of the castle keeping always a little in advance of him until she reached the church of Saint Augustine when she was joined by a young man

¹ Translated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

in a strange antique costume who took her by the hand and they entered the church together. The figures had been outlined very distinctly by the flood of light which streamed from the open door, and our guide was stupefied on attempting to follow them to discover that the church was closed, and on passing to the side and peering through a window that not even the gleam of a single candle illumined its dark interior.

It was easy to discredit the story, but on the following day while making researches in the Library of the Gambalunghiana it was with an eerie feeling that we read in a volume published in the cinque-cento the following paragraph:

A few days ago in the church of St. Augustine, in Rimini, they found in a marble sepulchre Paolo Malatesta and Francesca, daughter of Guido da Polenta, Lord of Ravenna, who by Gianciotto, son of Malatesta, Lord of Rimini, brother of the said Paolo, were both miserably killed with the blows of a poignard. Their clothes were of silk, and although they had been in this sepulchre for so many years, they were found in a perfect state of preservation.

An under-librarian noted our interest and drew attention to a small frame containing, as he averred, a piece of Francesca's dress. The scrap was faded and frayed, but it was with

the same creepy sensation that we noted that the fabric had once been of a deep pomegranate red and that it was heavily brocaded with gold.

The Rocca is possibly the most repellent and sinister stronghold in all Italy.

Leaning proudly backward its huge bulk seems as solidly planted and as arrogantly time-defying as the pyramids. It is the very embodiment of high-handed violence, a suitable cradle for that unscrupulous and insane race who were so rightly named the "wrong-headed," and who so proudly displayed as their insignia the elephant, symbol of brute force.

The room in which Francesca and Paolo read together and in which they were surprised and murdered by Gianciotto cannot be identified. It has probably been swept out of existence, for it was in the old fortress of the Gattolo which in 1438 was partially destroyed and partially incorporated in the Rocca by Sigismundo Malatesta, one of the most famous condottiere of his time, with whose wife, Isotta, Francesca must share the honours of ghostly hostess of the castle.

Isotta Malatesta was not a beautiful woman, though "an expression of patience, of

great constancy and endurance is conveyed by the long-lipped, close-shut mouth with the strong lines around it.”¹ She had been Sigismundo’s mistress before he made her his wife and that she realised the disgrace of her position is evident from the following letter written to Sigismundo shortly after the death of his second wife:

“My illustrious Lord: I have received your letter in which your Serenity swears that he loves me more than ever. I would be more certain of it if you would put an end to this thing which always makes me furious (*che sempre me tene arrabiata*).

“I ask that for love of me, wishing to preserve my life and happiness, your Serenity will realise our true marriage as quickly as possible (*vero spozamento piu presto che posette*).”

Strange to say her request was granted. Stranger still though no tomb to either of Sigismundo’s former wives (one a d’ Este and the other a Sforza) exists in the magnificent duomo of Rimini which Alberti erected for him, Isotta’s sarcophagus is borne by carven elephants, and the monogram, a linked I and S is displayed conspicuously again and again

¹ Mary Robinson Darmstetter in *The End of the Middle Ages*. See also *Un Condottiere du XV Siecle Gismundo Malatesta* by M. Yriarte.

Dante and Matilda

From the painting by Maignan in the Gallery of the Luxembourg

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throughout the building, while the face of the archangel upon the altar is her portrait.

That she was a wonderful woman for that age we must admit, for she not only wielded a most salutary influence over her warrior husband having the power to "appease his violences and to calm and console him in defeat when humiliated by Sforza or by the popes, he returned to the Rocca," but she inspired him to write poems of surprising delicacy of feeling, encouraged his patronage of art, and made herself beloved by his subjects and respected by her contemporaries.

It is said that the inscription upon her tomb, "*Tempus loquendi, tempus tacendi*," was chosen by herself as a plea for charitable silence.

Turning westward from Rimini we find not far from Reggio the ruins of Canossa, the most famous of all the castles of Matilda, "the great Countess."

Her palaces and strongholds are scattered throughout the length and breadth of Tuscany and Lombardy, and many of them are in astonishing preservation when we consider that over eight hundred years have passed since their lady signed the will which left her great

possessions to the partrimony of St. Peter. But though Canossa is now only an uninhabitable ruin it surpasses all of Matilda's other residences in interest as the scene of the most significant event in the history of Italy.

It was the strongest citadel in Lombardy, and the pinnacle of rock on which it stood was itself a stronghold, rising steeply from the plain to a height of fifteen hundred feet. Accessible only on one side by a narrow path, defended in every way known in mediæval times, the vestiges still remain of the triple walls, moats, and drawbridges which made Canossa in its day impregnable.

The magnificent view from the summit rewards the traveller for the fatiguing climb, for beyond the Lombard plain the snow-covered Alpine ranges shoulder each other in endless procession. To the south and west the castle is backed by the nearer Apennines of which the castellated crag is a spur. Desolate black ridges of volcanic rock, swept by terrible storms, give to the scene even in summer a stamp of savage grandeur and indescribable desolation.

Dante probably looked from its parapets, and if so the view must have appealed strongly to his storm-tossed soul. Matilda next to



VILLA GIACOMELLI
Detail of a fresco by Paul Veronese

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Beatrice is his ideal woman, and his description of his meeting with her in the last circle of Purgatory (the Garden of Eden) is one of the most beautiful passages in the *Divine Comedy*:

. . . My wondering eyes
 Pass'd onward o'er the streamlet to survey
 The tender May-bloom flushed through many a hue.
 . . . there I beheld

A lady, all alone who singing went
 And culling flower from flower wherewith her way
 Was all o'er painted. "Lady beautiful
 Thou who (if looks that use to speak the heart
 Are worthy of our trust,) with Love's own beam
 Dost warm thee," thus to her my speech I framed,
 "Ah! please thee hither toward the streamlet bend
 Thy step so near that I may list thy song."
 As when a lady, turning in the dance
 Doth foot it featly . . .

Over the yellow and vermilion flowers
 Thus turned she at my suit, most maiden-like
 Upon the opposite bank she stood and smiled
 As though her graceful fingers shifted still
 The intermingling dyes.
 "Strangers ye come, and happy in this place
 Which cradled human nature in her birth,
 Wondering ye view my smiles.

.
 This water thou beholdest
 Devolved is with power to take away
 Remembrance of offence . . .
 From whence its name is Lethe.
 They whose verse of yore,

The golden age recorded of this place
 Perhaps had dreamed. Here was man guiltless,
 here
 Perpetual spring and every fruit, and this
 The far-famed nectar."
 Singing as if enamoured she resumed
 And closed her song with "Blessed they
 Whose sins are covered." ¹

In Dante's allegory Matilda is supposed to represent the active life which constitutes the joy of earth even as the contemplative life, personified in Beatrice, is the felicity of Heaven.

History commends Dante's admiration, and to its pages we turn for a correct understanding of this remarkable woman.

Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, was the most powerful princess who ever reigned in Italy, for during her lifetime (1046 to 1115) Tuscany comprised Brescia, Modena, Reggio, Mantua, Ferrara and the greater part of northern Italy. She showed herself as able as she was courageous, as good as she was able, and singularly exempt from all human frailties. Why then, instead of awarding her a place in Paradise did Dante station her on the bank of the stream of Lethe which had

Purgatory canto xviii. Translation by Henry Francis Cary. The following sketch is principally drawn from *La Grande Italienne*, a history of Matilda by Amédée Renée.

power to obliterate all memory of offence and tell us that she was singing "Blessed are they whose sins are covered?"

What act whose memory could have caused remorse could this pure-minded woman have committed? She had taken as her spiritual guide, Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII.), a man whose sole ambition was the glory of the Church and who practised conscientiously the severe rules with which he strove to reform its clergy.

But there are mistakes which in their far-reaching evil consequences are worse than crimes, and such an one must be laid to the account of Hildebrand. Matilda with a woman's intuition may have seen the right path more clearly. If so, and a false humility restrained her from exercising her great influence over her leader, the mistake was her's as well as his.

Hildebrand came to his pontificate at a period when the papacy had reached its lowest degradation, and he conceived the idea of making it the world's dominant power. The pope should be king of kings and lord of lords throughout all Christendom. For twenty-five years before his election he had been schooled in diplomacy and in government as

the councillor and executor of weaker popes, as papal legate he had attended councils in France and Germany to correct abuses and reconcile strife and had thus been exceptionally fitted for the rôle which he was to play. Already in the short pontificate of his predecessor, Leo IX., the world had recognised a power behind the throne, a directing hand in many a complication in the politics of Europe.

To enforce this authority Hildebrand recognised the need of temporal power. Rome to be mistress of the world must first be mistress of Italy. Peter Damian "confounded by the audacity of his genius, the power of his political combinations, his insatiable ambition, called this founder of the Catholic monarchy Saint Satan." To such a man the problem was not a difficult one.

Matilda governed the north Italian states. She was a childless widow and the death of her parents, who had been devoted to the Church, left her untrammelled in the exercise of her power and with no nearer friend or adviser than Hildebrand. Southern Italy was in the hands of Robert Guiscard and Humphrey, sons of the Norman adventurer Tancred of Hauteville, who having been summoned to drive out the Saracens had found the country

to their liking and had established a kindgom for themselves.

Hildebrand had assisted Leo in an attempt to chastise these presumptuous crusaders; but the Norman's were better fighters than the Italians and had vanquished the papal forces. The pope, a prisoner, was at their mercy and was duly astonished when at the first interview with his captors they threw themselves on their knees at his feet and announced themselves his liegemen. Making a virtue of a necessity Leo created Robert Guiscard "Duke by the grace of God and Saint Peter of Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily," while Humphrey and their brother-in-law, Richard, received other fiefs. In return they agreed to recognise the pope as their feudal suzerian and to protect his person in time of danger. Hildebrand thus found himself nominally the governing centre of the entire peninsula, and his ambition to raise Italy to an independent political power of which he should be the head was not long concealed, and it woke at once the hostility of the German Emperor who had inherited from Charlemagne the title of Holy Emperor and exercised sovereignty over northern Italy through the margraves.

The feudal system which Charlemagne had

planted on free Italian soil had never taken deep root and existed now scarcely more than in name. Matilda's father had indeed been appointed margrave by the Emperor, but his subjects had accepted his rule by right of his descent from a mighty Lombard chief, and the patriotic idea of a free Italy was even then deeply ingrained in the hearts of the people. Henry III. had made his yoke an easy one and had seen the necessity for complete unanimity with the papal power; but Henry IV., a young and headstrong prince, who had now succeeded his more powerful father adopted the mistaken policy of measuring his strength with that of Hildebrand.

The immediate cause of dispute was the question of investiture. It had been one of the feudal rights of the Emperor to confer all clerical dignities within his dominions. Abbots and bishops received their croziers from him, and the rich benefices were acquired through bribery or direct purchase. Hildebrand had long laboured to suppress this corruption, but for Henry it was not only a source of revenue but of power. Upon Lombardy especially he saw that he had no hold except through this right of investiture, and the See of Milan falling vacant he sold it to

Godfrey, Lord of Castiglione, an Italian of noble family.

Hildebrand pronounced this appointment illegal and warned the faithful against "holding any communication with the simoniacal archbishop of Milan" or with bishops consecrated by him."

In Milan, however, Godfrey was popular; the city stood by him and all the more because Hildebrand in his zeal for reform had struck at a practice almost universal at that time, the marriage of the clergy. In the domain of Robert Guiscard married priests were preferred as pastors to celibates.

The archbishop of Ravenna lived openly with his lawful wife. The marriage of priests was well-nigh universal in Germany, and celibacy in Italy was considered as only binding upon monks and other cloistered persons. In France, where the stricter rule of Cluny¹ was held, the marriage of the clergy was not so common, but a far greater evil, concubinage, was prevalent, the priests boldly asserting that they were sworn indeed to celibacy but not to chastity.

The archbishop of Milan had quoted St.

¹For further study of this subject, see the author's *Romance of the French Abbays*.

Ambrose as permitting marriage, and he might also have appealed to the dictum of St. Paul. His easy rule was most popular with his clergy who rebelled against Hildebrand's anathema; and the pope only deferred dealing rigorously with them because of a project which at this time claimed his more immediate attention. The Emperor, Michael VII., had asked his help against the Turks and had promised a return of the Greek church to the domination of the pope. The idea of a crusade with such an end in view appealed to Hildebrand and he attempted to awaken Christendom to a like enthusiasm, promising Michael that he would himself take the field at the head of fifty thousand Italians.

But the time was not favourable for a crusade. The kings of Europe were engaged with other projects, there was no time to lead up popular zeal to the fighting pitch, and the great project fell through. Robert Guiscard's Normans when summoned to put themselves under the command of the pope rebelled. They had been led to the former crusade by Tancred, a warrior, governed by passions like their own, and the father of ten warlike sons. They would follow no incompetent fanatical shaveling, and Guiscard with

little care to punish their contempt of the pope consented to lead them personally.

Even Matilda, who had been invited by the pope to accompany the expedition as a pilgrim and who was on fire to undertake the romantic adventure, was unable to carry out her promise to raise a force of thirty thousand fighting men. Her subjects in the western part of Tuscany who were less accustomed to her personal governance than those in the vicinity of Mantua, rebelled, giving as a reason that they could not trust to the military skill of a woman. The more loyal besought her to marry and to give them a warrior duke in whom they could have confidence and whom they would fear. Matilda, chagrined and perplexed, wrote to Hildebrand for his advice and he, no less mortified by similar failure, reluctantly abandoned the crusade.

Other and graver troubles soon menaced the harassed pope. The German bishops incensed by attempt to impose the rule of celibacy upon all priests met in council at Worms and not only repudiated the decree against clerical marriage but Hildebrand's right to the papacy, bringing forward false and "incredible charges of licentiousness, witchcraft, bribery, and violence. A resolution renounc-

ing obedience to Gregory was signed, and the bishops then drew up a letter to 'brother Hildebrand,' as they dared to call him, setting forth their reasons. Among these was the irregularity of his election without the consent of the Emperor, and his intimacy with the Countess Matilda which was a scandal to the church."¹

A letter in the King's own name repeated all these charges but in more insulting terms, and was read at a public synod of Roman clergy:

"Henry, King by God's holy ordinance to Hildebrand, not pope, but the false monk.

"Condemned by the voice of all our bishops, quit the apostolic chair, and let another take it, who will preach the sound doctrine of St. Peter and not do violence under the cloak of religion. I, Henry, by the grace of God, king, with all my bishops, say unto thee, 'Get thee down, get thee down.'"

The pope received the documents from the Emperor's messenger with outward calmness but with the approbation of the assembled synod pronounced excommunication not only against all the bishops who had signed the letter but also on the Emperor himself, in such

¹ See *Hildebrand and his Times* by W. R. W. Stephens.

tremendous anathemas "as had never before been uttered by any pope."

They must have struck terror to the soul of Henry himself, for as though confirmed by God from that moment troubles swarmed quickly around. A powerful insurrection broke out in his own kingdom, and the allied king of France refused his assistance. Henry finally saw with dismay that his empire was slipping from his hands and that unless absolution could be obtained a new king would be elected, and in utter despair he set out in the guise of a penitent to seek reconciliation with Hildebrand.

The pope named Matilda's castle of Canossa as their rendezvous, refusing to allow Henry in his present reprobate state to enter the Holy City, and counting on the support of the Countess of Tuscany to awe him into submission.

Hildebrand arrived in advance of the imperial party, but an unauthenticated legend states that before his coming a strange and heart-moving deputation waited upon Matilda. The wives and children of the offending clergy of Milan and other cities, many of them beautiful women and some of noble birth, came in as large a body as could be mus-

tered and threw themselves upon their knees before her begging her intercession with the pope in the name of wifely and maternal affection.

But alas! Matilda had never known either. The passion of her deformed husband had been a horror to her, no children's fingers had touched her face with their sweet caressing or baby's head rested upon her bosom. If she looked upon the tear-stained faces with pity it was such compassion as she would have extended to a company of magdalens and foundlings, and the thought uppermost in her heart was: "This monstrous evil which has caused suffering to so many innocent beings must be done away with."

"You shall be provided for in nunneries," she promised, "your children educated at my expense, but you must quit your sinful relations with your paramours."

With that word it is said a great cry of indignation arose from the suppliants, and the greater part left her presence in anger. A few had fainted through excess of emotion, and one of these on her recovery pled with such modesty and so eloquently that Matilda was inwardly won and tears stood in her eyes though she would only promise that she would

lay their petition with its many signatures before the pope. If she fulfilled her promise she added no special plea in behalf of her humiliated sisters, and it may be that neglect of this great opportunity lay heavy upon her conscience before her baptism in Lethe obliterated its memory.

As for Hildebrand none can impugn the sincerity of his convictions. If he loved Matilda it was not as his enemies declared but with a love too great and pure to suggest to his mind any excuse for these sinners. It was in his power to have given joy and peace to thousands of hearts in his own time and to countless thousands in succeeding years by sanctioning the marriage of the clergy. It would doubtless have forestalled the Reformation and have contributed more than all the acts of his life taken together to the very purity and power of the Church which he had so much at heart.

If there came to the mind of Hildebrand during his two months' residence at Canossa as Matilda's guest any thought of the possibility of love sanctified by the sacrament of the Church made possible and honourable for her ministers and even for himself, he must have regarded it as a temptation of the Evil One.

And yet who can doubt that had he chosen, not to urge, but simply to have permitted, a general council to deliberate upon the question, the Church which shut its eyes to the wickedness of so many of its popes would gladly have freed them from vows which they seemed powerless to keep.

But to Hildebrand the sober, wedded life of Archbishop Guibert, who was shortly to be appointed anti-pope, was as iniquitous as the profligacy of the long line of popes who called their sons nephews; and the one clause among the charges launched against him by the Emperor and the Council at Worms which he could not forgive was the insulting accusation that he loved Matilda.

It was this insult to her as well as to him which steeled Hildebrand's heart when the culprit appeared before her castle, and made his penance at her door so bitter and humiliating.

It was January when the Emperor arrived, but Hildebrand would not allow him to be admitted to the castle. For three successive mornings he climbed the steep pathway bare-foot clad only in his shirt and stood all day before the gate which still bears the name of the "Porta di Penitenza," knocking and imploring vainly for admittance.

Not even when Matilda herself interceded for him would the pope yield. The memory of Henry's slander rankled too deeply, and it was not until the evening of the third day of penance that Hildebrand deigned to pay the least attention to the suppliant Emperor.

The terms which he then sent him were hard indeed. Henry must lay aside his crown and announce to his subjects that they were released from allegiance until bidden by the pope to acknowledge him as their sovereign. Henry's humiliation was complete, he agreed to do this, and, admitted to the presence of Hildebrand, threw himself weeping at his feet.

Then, and not till then, was the ban of excommunication removed.

It was a mistaken triumph, partaking too evidently of the nature of revenge and Henry could neither forget nor forgive it. There was a revulsion of popular feeling, too, in the Emperor's behalf. His subjects felt themselves humiliated in this treatment of their head, and Hildebrand was criticised as cruel and revengeful. As months passed by and the pope did not confirm Henry's right to his kingdom he grew impatient and insubordinate and scoffed at the pontiff's authority.

Hildebrand, on the other hand, grew more overbearing, and the inevitable rupture came at last. Henry proclaimed Hildebrand deposed, and Guibert, Archbishop of Ravenna, Pope in his stead, and putting himself at the head of his army set out for Rome.

Matilda at once took the field commanding her troops in person, and those who had refused to follow her to the Holy Land expiated their rebellion by obedience when they saw their country invaded. Again and again with varying success she engaged the imperial army and hindered its progress. Beaten near Verona she threw herself into Florence, and when that city capitulated after a siege of a month, she defended Cremona and Padua. Almost ubiquitous she appeared within the walls of every threatened city reanimating the courage of the besieged, bringing provisions, ammunition, and soldiers and making successful sorties. In vain Henry attempted the reduction of her fortresses of Canossa, Montebello, Carpineta, and Bibianello. On the ramparts of each the standard of Matilda flapped mockingly in the breeze announcing that the Amazon Countess was personally conducting its defence.

At last, giving up the attempt to reduce

these isolated castles and leaving no garrison in conquered cities, Henry marched directly to the siege of Rome. He did not succeed in investing it, however, before Matilda had reinforced the pope with a large part of her army and had sent him a train of wagons laden with supplies and with the silver and golden ornaments of all her churches.

But Henry had come armed with long patience and he continued the siege of Rome for three years. All of Matilda's skirmishing was powerless to dislodge him, and at length Godfrey of Bouillon, the Emperor's standard bearer, took the city by assault, a sacrilege for which he did penance in later years by the taking of Jerusalem from the infidels. Hildebrand held himself in the castle of St. Angelo, but he must have known that Guibert had been consecrated pope and was installed in the palace of the Lateran and that the new pope had crowned Henry.

In this distress Hildebrand summoned his vassal Robert Guiscard, who had returned victorious from the Orient, and the bold adventurer drawn doubtless as much by the expectation of loot as by his engagements to his feudal lord came to his relief with a mixed army of Norman pirates, Italian brigands,

and even Saracens. Henry with his army fled incontinently, and Guiscard under pretence of avenging the infidelity of Rome to the pope put the city to sack and flame. Modern palaces and ancient monuments, the homes of the poor and convents and churches were indiscriminately pillaged and burned with frightful cruelties and massacre of the feebly resisting populace. Then with their booty and hundreds of captives the liberators of the pope, having accomplished their holy errand, returned as suddenly as they had come, taking Hildebrand with them to Salerno.

Matilda and her army threw themselves upon the retreating Germans and harried them out of Italy. Her war-cry, "St. Peter for thine own" was everywhere the signal of victory, and but a small portion of the Emperor's invading army returned to their homes.

The exciting scenes through which he had passed and his anguish at seeing Rome sacked by his spiritual son had sapped the strength of Hildebrand though they had not broken his spirit, and he died at Salerno two years later (1085) repeating: "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile."

While Hildebrand lay dying he wrote touching letters to this "daughter of St. Peter," advising her, exhorting and giving her pardon for her faults and praise for her virtues, and he recommended that the election of his successor should be delayed until she could be present and that he should defer to her counsels as he himself had always done.

Matilda had already made her will leaving all of her possessions to the Church, and had given the document to Hildebrand. As after his death it could not be found, she repeated the donation twenty-five years later in the most formal terms, placing herself and her heirs henceforth "outside of her estates and absent from them," without power to oppose any disposition which the Church chose to make of them. But the "great Countess" was never allowed to be absent, for thirty years longer she was the General-in-Chief of the army of Urban II. as she had been of that of Gregory VII. She had taken up arms at the age of fifteen and she only laid them down the year of her death, opposing the Emperor during her life in sixty combats.

It was Urban's policy, however, to put an end to this conflict by diplomacy. Guelfo, the young duke of Bavaria, had quarrelled with

the Emperor, and the pope conceived the idea of uniting his forces and estates with those of Matilda by marriage and thus creating a formidable and permanent bulwark against imperial encroachments.

Guelfo was only eighteen, Matilda forty; the marriage was one of simple policy and was not happy, and when she renewed her cession of her lands to the holy see Guelfo, disappointed in his expectations, sought divorce and returned indignant to his own realm. He had made his impress upon history, however, by giving his name to Matilda, for the word Guelf stood thereafter throughout succeeding centuries as designating the papal interests and partisans just as Ghibelline, adopted at the same time from Henry's birthplace, represents henceforth the imperial cause and its supporters.

The Guelfs were not always on the side of Italian independence, and when we reflect on the innumerable factional wars which made these words their rallying cry we sympathise with that Visconti who decreed that no one should mention the terms "Guelf" and "Ghibelline" under pain of death.

Urban saw plainly that the only infallible way to maintain peace between the powers of

Christendom was to unite their arms in external warfare, and he threw all his influence and resources into the crusade preached by Peter the Hermit. He would not permit Matilda to take part in it personally though she had never given up the desire which Hildebrand had encouraged, and had headed a short expedition into Africa to chastise the Barbary pirates. She sent her knights and yeomen, however, who whitened with their bones the route of that illy planned and disastrous expedition.

Hard indeed it must have seemed to Matilda in her still bellicose old age to know that not to her but to the enemy whom she had driven from Italy, Godfrey of Bouillon, was permitted the conquest of Jerusalem. She has been compared to Joan of Arc, but she was more nearly the counterpart of Saint Louis. She would have preferred to have died as he did in an attempt to drive the infidel from Palestine. Her dearest title was Daughter of the Church, and to the esteem in which it held her Matilda's tomb in the Church of St. Peter's in Rome, with her statue by Bernini and the relievo of the scene at Canossa, bears abundant witness; but God was better to her than she asked, and as the Deliverer of Italy

higher honour was to be accorded to her in the gratitude of her country and the admiration of Dante.

Is it too far a cry from the *Divine Comedy* of Dante to the *Commedia Umana* of Boccaccio, from Dante's drama of the human soul in its relation to the great ethic questions of this life and the tremendous possibilities of the life beyond the grave, to Boccaccio's careless, joyous, *novelli* with their frank epicurean acceptance of the pleasure of the senses?

We may well be indignant that Dante, the idealist and great epic poet, striving always to chain the beast in man, was as the voice of one crying in the wilderness and met with little love in his own day, while even now those who call him master are but as one in ten thousand to the lovers of the art of the novelist of which Boccaccio was the first exponent.

We are rightly exasperated too that so great a genius as Boccaccio should have been so unscrupulously indiscriminating in the choice of his themes, revelling alike in beauty, in courtesy, and nobility and in coarse humour and obscene jests, not necessarily preferring the evil, but with Shakespearian grasp, inter-

ested in every phase of human life and telling everything with the naïveté of a child whose moral sense is as yet undeveloped.

Boccaccio wrote from pure joy in his story and its telling, and in so doing his plots are almost always entertaining and his technique artistic. He was a realist describing life as he saw it with no moral purpose behind the story which for this very reason gives a tremendous impression of truth, and when we find characters of exquisite refinement and purity gleaming in his pages like swamp-lilies, our faith in the innate nobility of human nature is strengthened. Revolted by his coarser types let us remember that it has taken centuries of practice in literature to draw the line between the subjects which are and which are not fit for the author's pen, that even in our own day these limits are continually overstepped, and that if Boccaccio seems to have been ungifted with the faculty of selection that privilege at least remains to us.

Like Dante Boccaccio was a wanderer and gathered his infinite variety of flower and weed from every field in Italy.

If we would trace his steps we must begin with his ancestral villa at Certaldo, eighteen miles from Florence, the mansion which he

retained when he divided his father's estate with his brother but which he never loved, describing it as "the dark, silent, melancholy house which holds me much against my will," and "where one laughs but seldom."

This was doubtless because he contrasted it with his gay life at Naples and returned to it unwillingly while his heart was still with the fair Fiammetta.

Though he speaks of Certaldo as the seat of his ancestors it is almost certain that Boccaccio himself was born in Paris where his father a Florentine merchant had married a French lady. Returning to Italy his father sent him to school in Florence, and at the age of fourteen to Naples to attend to his mercantile interests. Boccaccio remained in Naples thirteen years, but does not seem to have devoted himself seriously to business. He had the *entr  e* to court society, where he was popular on account of his wit and brilliancy as a raconteur of entertaining stories. Here he met and loved Fiammetta, daughter of King Robert of Sicily. It was she who first recognised his talent; at her suggestion he wrote his first poems, and to her he dedicated the works of his earlier manhood.

Her influence over him, while similar to that

of Laura's upon Petrarch, was more consciously and purposefully exerted. Neither Petrarch nor Boccaccio was capable of the sublimated devotion with which Dante worshipped Beatrice. Fiammetta and Laura were flesh-and-blood women, not spiritual abstractions such as Beatrice became to Dante; but though their affection was intensely human it inspired their work, and Boccaccio, who worshipped Dante though he could not comprehend him, rose to his highest flight in the poem to his master (translated with such charm by Rossetti) in which he coupled Fiammetta's name with that of Beatrice:

Dante, if thou within the sphere of Love,
As I believe, remainst contemplating
Beautiful Beatrice, whom thou didst sing
Erewhile, and so wast drawn to her above;
Unless from false life, true life, thee remove,
So far that Love's forgotten, let me bring
One prayer before thee: for an easy thing
This were to thee whom I do ask it of;
I know that where all joy doth most abound
In the third Heaven my own Fiammetta sees
The grief which I have borne since she is dead.
O pray her (if mine image be not drowned
In Lethe) that her prayers may never cease
Until I reach her and am comforted.

There is something very touching in Boccaccio's adoration of the man who was so

great a contrast to himself in every respect. He not only accepted the professorship for the study of Dante's works instituted at Florence, but endeavoured to win Petrarch to his own enthusiasm; and when on his visit to Petrarch at his villa at Arqua the jealous poet arrogantly boasted that he had never read a line of Dante, Boccaccio transcribed the entire *Divine Comedy* with his own hand and sent it to him as a gift.

Boccaccio also wrote a *Life of Dante*, and persuaded the Florentines to award to Dante's daughter the ten golden florins which he himself presented to her at her convent in Ravenna.

While Boccaccio bewailed the "lost years" of early life spent as it seemed to him so fruitlessly in conducting his father's commercial enterprises, and in the still emptier round of court society, it was precisely in this university of the actual world that he acquired his broad knowledge of life. Had he spent his youth in scholastic pursuits he would doubtless have become an accomplished classical scholar but would never have inaugurated the literature of the future. When finally permitted to devote himself to study it was with a famished eagerness which devoured and assimilated



THE DECAMERON

From a painting by Jacques Wagrez. With permission of Ad. Braun & Co.

1760

everything which pertained to the art of writing and with a matureness of judgment combined old forms with originality of invention to accommodate his wealth of collected material and still more inexhaustible imagination. So he wrote and studied for years in retirement at Certaldo, where finally he returned to die, and the lamp which lighted his labour is shown us. Here honours came to him, and his love for Fiammetta grew shadowy in proportion as his passion for literature grew, and he was comforted for his early disappointments.

The beauty of his surroundings gradually made their impress upon his imagination, and it is no longer Naples but Fiesole that we recognise as the scene of his *novelli*. At Fiesole he located, so distinctly that the two villas can still be recognised as the stage setting of his collection of one hundred tales which he called the *Decameron*.

It was in the year 1348 he tells us that the great plague visited Florence. In four months a hundred thousand persons perished. All who could do so fled the city.

What noble palaces were then depopulated to the last inhabitant! what families became extinct! What vast possessions were left, and no known heir to

inherit them! . . . The city being left almost without inhabitants it happened that seven ladies, all discreet, nobly descended and accomplished (between the ages of twenty-eight and eighteen), the eldest Pampinea, the next Fiammetta, the third Filomena, the fourth Emilia, the fifth Lauretta, the sixth Nefele, and the youngest Eliza, had been attending Divine service at Santa Maria Novella where they formed the whole congregation.

Lingering to converse with each other they decided to take their maids "and choose some place of retirement of which every one of us has more than one, where our ears may be entertained by the warbling of birds and our eyes with the verdure of the hills and valleys; with the waving of cornfields like the sea itself, with trees and a more open sky and a more agreeable prospect."

Three gentlemen: Pamfilo, Filostrato, and Dioneo related to four of the ladies and each in love with one of the other three are permitted to join the party, and on the next day they removed to a villa "two short miles from the city," which has been identified as Poggio Gherardo now Villa Ross, which Rogers thus describes:

Round the green hill they went,
Round underneath first to a splendid house,
Gherardi, so an old tradition runs,
That on the left just rising from the vale,

A place for luxury, the painted rooms,
The open galleries, and middle court
Not unprepared, fragrant and gay with flowers.

The castellated front of this villa still looks
out upon the valley and the interior answers
exactly to Boccaccio's description:

It was a little eminence, remote from any road,
covered with trees and shrubs, and on the top was a
stately palace with a grand and beautiful court in
the middle, surrounded by loggie, and within were
fine apartments, elegantly furnished and adorned by
jocund frescoes. Around it were most delightful
gardens with fountains of the purest water and cel-
lars of rare wines. This palace they found set in
order for their reception, the rooms all graced with
flowers.

Here a different lady was each evening
crowned as queen, to order the programme of
the next day's pleasure which include stroll-
ing in the woods, flute playing by Dioneo, and
songs to the viol by Fiammetta, dancing,
games of chess and backgammon, feasting and
pleasant conversation.

And always after the siesta

Wandering in idleness, but not in folly
They sate in the high grass and in the shade
Of many a tree, sun proof day after day,
When all was still and nothing to be heard
But the cicala's voice among the olives,
Relating in a ring, to banish care,
Their hundred tales.

On the fifth day the company moved to another villa "towards the west by an unfrequented lane, a beautiful and splendid palace."

This unfrequented lane still leads past San Dominico to the Villa Palmieri where the second series of the tales were told. It is thus described by Boccaccio:

The palace was seated on an eminence in the middle of a large plain. When they had entered and seen the great hall and the elegant chambers, they greatly extolled it judging its lord to be a truly magnificent person. Thence they went to rest in an open gallery whither the master of the house brought wine and sweetmeats for their refreshment.

They were then shown into the garden. All round and through the midst were pergolas whose trellis walls were covered with white and red roses and jasmine which excluded even the midday sun.

In the midst of the grass plot, set round with orange and cedar trees, was a fountain of white marble which made a most refreshing plashing; the water carried to every part of the garden by runnels united in a waterfall at its exit which turned the wheels of two mills.

The lord referred to by Boccaccio was Cioni di Fini who sold the villa to a member of the Tolomei family, who in turn sold it to the Palmieri from whom it was named.

In 1874 it was purchased by the Earl of Crawford, and Queen Victoria twice occupied it as Lady Crawford's guest.

Its seventeenth century façade with somewhat startling stencilled panelling and its graceful entrance stairway conspicuous from the road through archways cut in the wall of shrubbery are not the same that Boccaccio saw; but the villa has a joyous aspect which well agrees with its ancient name Schiffanoja, or Banish Care.

On each of the ten days spent in these two villas ten lively tales were related whose plots were collected by Boccaccio from many sources: some brought back by the Crusaders from the Holy Land where they had found their way across Arabia told by Oriental storytellers journeying from farther India; others from the fabliaux brought from Provence by the French Trouvères or by the Normans to southern Italy; the tales of the Arabian Nights and the romances of Arthur's Table Round thus joining hand with folk-lore stories native to Italy, and the mythology of Rome and Greece. With these Boccaccio interwove minor anecdotes in a prodigal *intrecciatura* or embroidery of brief motives upon the wider tapestry of the main story.

In such variety of source and theme at such an uncritical period it is not surprising that he included many a tale of amorous intrigue

or practical joke more laughable than choice, and our wonder is simply that he imagines these off-colour stories told in the presence of virtuous ladies.

He is careful to remind us [says Symonds] that though there were lovers in that band of friends "no stain defiled the honour of the company"; yet these unblemished maidens listen with laughter and a passing blush to words which outrage our present sense of decency, . . . for the best society of the period found entertainment in discussing themes which would now be scarcely tolerated in a barrack.

Even this explanation hardly satisfies, and we can almost believe that Boccaccio himself felt the unfitness to their audience of Dioneo's stories, when he explains:

"If Dioneo's novel was not much laughed at by the ladies it was not from its want of mirth but from their modesty." We can imagine the merry jester seated abashed at Pampinea's feet as after, "attempting to sing what the queen disapproved she said with some warmth, 'Dioneo, I will have none of this ribaldry, either sing a song fit to be heard, or you shall see that I know how to resent it.'"

The courts of the most refined Italian princes for centuries kept their buffoons whose low jests were repeated in the presence of virtuous and high-born ladies, and the court

poets and dramatists were no better. The fact that the favourite plays in Italy were burlesques at the time that the Elizabethan dramatists framed their most popular scenarios from blood-curdling Italian legends is explained by the statement that the English craved tragedy because their lives were mere farce, while the Italians acted comedy because they lived their tragedies.

Boccaccio was a master in both, for his story of the *Pot of Basil* is Dantesque in its power and pathos, ranking with that of Francesca and La Pia, while the horror of the grisly thing which the crazed girl cherishes is depicted with a subtlety unapproached by any modern expert in the art of depicting ghoulish terrors.

He could have had no more sympathetic transcriber than Keats, and yet the sensitive poet's apology for attempting the versification of the tale rings sincere:

O eloquent and famed Boccaccio
Of thee we now should ask forgiving boon
For venturing syllables that ill beseem
The quiet glooms of such a piteous theme.
Grant thou a pardon here, and then the tale
Shall move on soberly as it is meet;
There is no other crime, no mad assail,
To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet.

If Boccaccio did not consciously play to the gallery in neglecting tragedy for comedy, his willingness to give his audience what they most appreciated was doubtless a great factor in his popularity. So ready were they to laugh on the least provocation that many of his tales which were pronounced in his day vastly witty, as for instance the practical jokes of Buffalmacco, seem to us stupid in the extreme. This Buffalmacco was not a fictitious character, but a contemporary artist whose waggish pranks had endeared him to the popular heart and are related with great gusto by Sacchetti and Vasari; and though he was a painter of such merit that he was chosen to adorn the Campo Santo of Pisa with a fresco representing the Creation, his jokes rendered him more celebrated than his art. That he could have persuaded the worthy abbess of the convent for which he was painting an altar-piece that it was necessary for him to have a quart of wine daily with which to mix his paints in order to give the flesh-tones the proper carnations was far greater proof of cleverness in the estimation of the majority than any legitimate triumph of his brush, and the least grain of humour pardoned the most equivocal situations.

In contrast to Dioneo's objectionable stories it is a delight to listen to Pampinea's romance of *Ser Federigo and the Falcon*, laid in two adjoining villas which we may amuse ourselves in locating, and we will find many that will realise the charming description. But where in literature or in real life in our own day shall we match the lovable character of Ser Federigo whose "perseverance in attachment, gallantry, and generosity are so unconscious and involuntary and brought out in such unlooked for and unostentatious circumstances as to show that they are woven into the very nature and soul of the author."

Longfellow versified the story with loving appreciation in his *Tales of the Wayside Inn*, elaborating with sympathetic touches Boccaccio's sketch of Fiesole:

Monna Giovanna, widowed in her prime,
Had come with friends to pass the summer time
In her grand villa half way up the hill,
O'erlooking Florence, but retired and still
With iron gates that opened through long lines
Of sacred ilex and centennial pines;
And terraced garden and broad steps of stone,
And sylvan deities with moss o'ergrown,
And fountains palpitating in the heat,
And all Val d'Arno stretched beneath its feet.

There are many other descriptions of villas

in the *Decameron* of great charm—notably that of Neri degli Uberti at Castellamare where his two lovely daughters, Isotta La Bella and Ginevra La Bionda, amused King Charles the Victorious, by diving and sporting in the pools, catching the fish in their hands, and tossing them to the King. The Villa Quisisana now occupies the site of the palace built by Charles in 1300, and it is very possible that traditions may exist in its neighbourhood of Neri degli Uberti's fishponds and his Nereid daughters.

The castle of Tancred at Salerno, with the cave connected by a secret staircase with Sigismunda's chamber, is so realistically painted that it serves as data for the scenery, as the story itself has done for Bernhardt's favourite play of *La Gismonda*.

Boccaccio doubtless heard these two legends during his stay at Naples and probably visited both the villa at Castellamare and the castle at Salerno, which was old even at the date when Robert Guiscard and his Normans stormed it after an eight months' siege. Certainly the following description of the castle (translated by Dryden) has a particularity of detail, which would seem to be that of an eyewitness:

Next the proud palace of Salerno stood
A mount of rough ascent and thick with wood.
Through this a cavern was dug out with vast
expense,
The work it seemed of some suspicious prince,
Who when abusing power with lawless might,
From public justice would secure his flight.
The passage made by many a winding way
Reached e'en the room in which the tyrant lay.
From hence by stairs descending to the ground
In the blind grot a safe retreat was found,
Its outlet ended in a brake o'ergrown
With brambles choked by time and now unknown.

The ruins of the castle still crown the hill
above Salerno, and goat-herds stable their
flocks in the cavern.

It was during his sojourn at Naples, too,
that Boccaccio found his more pleasing story
of *Lisa and King Pedro of Sicily*. George
Eliot transcribed it in her poem, *How Lisa
Loved the King*, and very honestly acknow-
ledged her debt in the envoi:

Reader, this story pleased me long ago
In the bright pages of Boccaccio,
And where the author of a good we know
Let us not fail to pay the grateful thanks we owe.

Here, too, the major part of the action of
the poem is in a villa, that of Lisa's wealthy
father at Palermo, where the King with his
brilliant court did honour to Lisa.

And all descending at the garden gate,
 Streamed with their feathers, velvet, and brocade,
 Through the pleached alleys, till they passing made
 A lake of splendour mid the aloes grey—
 Where meekly facing all their proud array,
 The white robed Lisa with her parents stood.

A joyous hum is heard the gardens round,
 Soon there is Spanish dancing and the sound
 Of minstrels' song, and autumn fruits are pluckt,
 Till mindfully the king and queen conduct
 Lisa apart to where a trellised shade
 Made pleasant resting.

There was betrothal made that very morn
 Twixt Perdicone, youthful, brave, well-born,
 And Lisa whom he loved.

Many more of Boccaccio's tales have for
 their backgrounds villas or castles or country
 scenes, and while it would be manifestly ab-
 surd to attempt to identify them all, to dis-
 cover Giotto's country seat which he tells us
 was somewhere in the Mugello; to point out
 the exact castle in which the bandit Ghino di
 Tacco imprisoned the Abbot of Cligny,¹ to find
 the house of the Patient Griselda, or the log-
 gia where Lorenzo

“leant

Into the sunrise o'er the balustrade”

¹ Since this volume has gone to press the author, chancing to refer to Hawthorne's French and Italian Notebooks, finds that Mr. Hawthorne and his family visited this same castle of the robber-knight Ghino di Tacco at Mount Radi cofani, near Viterbo, and has given on page 462 a most entertaining description of the picturesque ruin.

and where later Isabella watered her pot of basil with her tears, or even to establish with any positiveness among the superb villas of Genoa the one where Erminio di Grimaldi caused *Liberality* to be painted in such praise-worthy fashion. Still the mere following of these homeless ghosts will lead us through such pleasant places that we can take no guides so satisfying. Then, too, there is always the possibility of some surprising discovery with which to give the most matter-of-fact archæologist a reason for our wandering, and if our ghosts are really homeless they may introduce us to many courteous hosts hitherto unknown to us, the proprietors of spacious and hospitable habitations. Thus in seeking fruitlessly for Grimaldi's villa we find that of Andrea Doria, with his statue throned as Neptune, and reading the glorious record of this family we are won to such admiration that we almost forget the palatial villa upon the Brenta where the history of the exploits of the Venetian Pisanis so exactly matches that of their rivals the Genoese Dorias.

I have selected Dante and Boccaccio as typical examples of authors whose magic has made to live again the long-vanished ladies who queened it in these lovely Italian villas,

because they of all authors writing on **Italian** themes are most broadly comprehensive in their treatment of character and place; and because they have been the great inspirers of later writers; but you may choose whom you will among those who have loved **Italy**: Shakespeare, Browning, Rossetti, Shelley, George Eliot, and tracing the gentle ghosts which have glided from their imaginations into your hearts, you will thereafter for all your life be doubly haunted, not alone by the enchantment of the tale, but also by the witchery of the scene which gave it birth.

II

AN AFTERWORD

Petrarch, in many ways the connecting link between Dante and Boccaccio, should not be passed without a word. But it is Provence and the papal court at Avignon and not Italy that we associate with Petrarch, for save for brief intervals he was an exile from his native land until the close of his life.

One spot he loved and painted again and again—his French hermitage at Vacluse. The most perfect of the *canzoni* in which he describes it, the one beginning



PALAZZO DEL TÉ, GARDEN FAÇADE



PALAZZO DEL TÉ, MANTUA
Giulio Romano

Chiare, fresche, e dolci acqua,

is in its translation by Leigh Hunt so exquisite a picture of a haunted villa that it is impossible not to give it place:

Clear, fresh, and dulcet streams
Which the fair shape who seems
To me, sole woman, haunted at noontide!
How well I call to mind

.

When from those boughs the wind
Shook down upon her bosom flower on flower,
And there she sat meek-eyed
In midst of all that pride,
Sprinkled and blushing through an amorous shower,
Some to her hair paid dower,
And seemed to dress her curls
Queenlike, with gold and pearls;
Some snowing on her drapery stopped,
Some on the earth, some on the water dropped;
While others fluttering from above
Seemed wheeling round in pomp and saying, "Here
reigns Love!"

And from that time to this, I bear
Such love for the green bower, I cannot rest
elsewhere.

The modest villa at Arquà, near Padua,
where Petrarch spent the last years of his life,
immersed in study and where he was found
bent in death over a volume of his beloved
Virgil, is still full of his personality. It was
in this calm retreat that he wrote to Boccaccio,

who begged him not to labour so unremittingly:

I should assuredly only die the sooner if I followed your advice. Continued work and application form my soul's nourishment. So soon as I commenced to rest and relax I should cease to live. I know my own powers. I am not fitted for other kinds of work, but my reading and writing, which you would have me discontinue, are easy tasks; nay, they are a delightful rest, and relieve the burden of heavier anxieties. There is no lighter burden, nor more agreeable, than a pen. Other pleasures fail us or wound us while they charm, but the pen we take up rejoicing and lay down with satisfaction, for it has the power to advantage not only its lord and master, but many others as well, even though they be far away, sometimes, indeed, though they be not born for thousands of years to come. I believe that I speak but the strict truth when I claim that as there is none among earthly delights more noble than literature, so there is none so lasting, none gentler or more faithful; there is none which accompanies its possessor through the vicissitudes of life at so small a cost of effort and anxiety. . . .

Arqua is only one point of many which will make a driving tour in the Euganean Hills a most delightful experience. It may be combined with the famous villa and gardens of Val San Zibio, the fantastic castle of the Obizis at Cataio, and the villa at Este called I Capucini, which Byron lent to Shelley, where

the latter wrote his rhapsody to the Euganean Hills.

Shelley is a true landscapist, the poet who best gives us atmospheric effects and colour. His description of the view from his villa is precisely that of an impressionistic painter—

Beneath is spread like a green sea
The waveless plain of Lombardy,

While the Venetian sunrise which he there painted in words is only comparable to one of Turner's dazzling canvases:

Lo the sun upsprings behind,
Broad, red, radiant half reclined
On the level, quivering line
Of the waters crystalline,—
And before that chasm of light,
As within a furnace bright,—
Column, tower and dome and spire
Shine like obelisks of fire.

The villas of this region and the present rural life of Lombardy are charmingly described by Margaret Symonds in her *Days Spent on a Doge's Farm*. She tells us regretfully—

how little property is respected or cared for now in out-of-the way corners of Italy. Browning's poem holds good, and dear to the heart of modern Italian youth are the sounds of the piazza. The ruins of

greatness are there still. Oh! yes, you will easily find them—the little old villas smothered in weeds or baring their breasts to the winter floods and mist. Scrape away the grass there on the door step, and you will see it is carved in no ordinary stone but from a block of exquisite marble. And the glass has fallen from the window frames, but the ironwork which marked it is there still, marvellously wrought, embossed perhaps with beaten roses, fretted with coats of arms. Grain and straw have been stored in the reception rooms; they have scratched the faces of Venetian senators or bruised the lovely limbs of Aphrodite. But enough remains of these ghost frecoes to show you that they once were painted in colours bright and pure And which of us would change this desolation full of the dreams of “dear dead women.”

We are tempted to linger longer in Lombardy, to trace at Mantua the history of the Palazzo del Tè built and decorated by Raphael's friend and pupil, Giulio Romano, and haunted by traditions of Isabella d' Este,—to devote certain pages as well to the grim legends which cluster around the mediæval fortalice of the Estes at Ferrara, and to dally in the palace of Urbino with Raphael, Bembo, Castiglione, and Emila Pia. At Perugia also the griffin, emblem of the Baglionis, guards their iron-bound chest, a Pandora's box of family crimes which fascinate by their very horror.



FIRE-PLACE IN THE CASTLE OF SANTA MARIA ORA COLLEONI AT THIENE

1. 10

2.

Nothing has been told here of the Visconti and Sforzas whose history is that of Milan, and almost nothing of that region of enchantment the Italian Lakes—where the villas of the nobles of northern Italy shine “white as clustered swans.” If we strike northward across this Lombard plain to Giorgione’s and Titian’s country which Ruskin and Meredith loved “where wavering in and out of view like flying wings, and shadowed like wings of archangels with rose and with orange and with violet, silver white Alps are seen . . . leaning as in a great flight forward upon Lombardy,” we shall find the lower peaks still crowned by a different kind of habitation—no longer Palladian palaces but battlemented feudal castles in exterior aspect, even when like that of the Giustinianis the strong enceinte of protecting walls holds a Renaissance villa within its embracing arms.

There is a castellated villa of this description near the sub-Alpine town of Thiene, which was once the home of that grand condottiere, Bartolommeo Colleoni, whose equestrian statue, the noblest in all Italy, commands our admiration so imperiously at Venice. It came into his possession late in life, for he was a Bergamesk and loved his native city. But when Venice,

in appreciation of his military genius, made him Generalissimo of her army, it became advisable for him to have his family near enough to be under his protection and he removed them to this stronghold. For the veteran had many enemies who would not have scrupled to kidnap or massacre his wife and daughters had it been in their power to do so—the King of France whom Colleoni had humiliated and beaten when Milan made him Protector of the Republic, his old comrades in arms, Francesco Sforza, who believed that Colleoni had betrayed him, and Carmagnola whom he had outrivalled, besides many an envious Venetian who had joined in the dastardly plot to assassinate him.

But Colleoni went his way fearlessly, victoriously to the very end. We can imagine him sitting his powerful war-horse in that alert, masterful attitude, which Verocchio caught, as he rode slowly up to the drawbridge of his castle, where his wife who bore the fateful name of the bride of Pyramus, but who was too prudent to show her pretty face at any loop-hole in its strong walls, serenely awaited his coming.

Thisbe Colleoni was a Martinengo, and we know how beautiful were the ladies of this

house from their portraits painted by Moretto in his happiest moods on the walls of their Brescian palace. Here the artist has chosen to pose them under arches of trellis-work backed by views of the family villa of Salo on Lake Garda, where, Countess Evelyn Martinengo Cesaresco tells us the Duke of Bracciano and Vittoria Accoramboni were guests, and where the Duke met his death.

A very different dwelling this mountain eyrie of Thiene, but a fitting nest in which to bring up the little ones of the bold war-eagle. Four daughters were born to them. Three married their cousins, three Martinengo brothers, and to these Bartolommeo Colleoni gave generous portions, for he was very rich both from the gratitude of Venice and by earlier pillage. In memory of the one who never married, Medea, he founded at his native city a charity, by which fifty young girls annually received dowrys.

What was the story of this loved child who gave weddings gifts to countless happy brides but never tasted their joy?

We know her from her pathetic marble effigy recumbent on the beautiful tomb in the cathedral of Bergamo. She is frail of figure, her face sharp in profile and hollow-cheeked.

Her long, thin arms lie relaxed, the sensitive fingers patiently folded. She is not sleeping, but waiting—even so the sculptor may have seen her when her strength was failing and she lay in gentle resignation quietly expectant of release. There is no ecstasy of hope in the wan face, nor any deep regret at leaving life so young, only a great weariness as of one who had found life a vain dream.

Over the mantel of the great hall at the villa of Colleoni there are strange frescoes, and among them quite a different type of woman, who is pointed out as Medea, Colleoni's favourite daughter. Were they indeed the same Medea, this superbly developed woman who toys with Love, and the Medea starved in body and heart that lies at Bergamo? Is it the old story told by Bembo.

Mentre ad Amor non si commise ancora
Vidi Colco Medea lieta e sicura;
Poi ch'arse per Jason acerba e dura
Fu la sua vita in fin ultim'ora.¹

But this and many another pathetic story I

¹ Translated by Horatio Brown :

While yet to Love unyielded and estranged
Medea looked on Colchis free and glad ;
But when she longed for Jason bitter and sad
Was all her life henceforth to her last hour unchanged.

may not tell. The cover of my book closes like a door between us and troops of alluring, beckoning ghosts, as real as our very selves to those of us

who have sought our way
Where all this music sounds this sunlight gleams,
'Mid Pride and Power and Beauty day by day—
For what are we? I heard my own soul say:
“But wandering phantoms in a world of dreams.”

INTRODUCTORY READING.

It is impossible to give a bibliography of authorities consulted in the preparation of this book, but a word of acknowledgment to those who have most aided the writer is assuredly due and may be found of service to those who love the pleasant pastime of matching place to story and who may care for a brief list of easily accessible books as appetisers to their first wanderings in Italy.

The beginner can find no more inspiring author than John Addington Symonds. He is a leader par excellence, and he has been the master of many enthusiastic delvers in this field; among whom are his daughter, Margaret Symonds, Mary Robinson Darmstetter, in her admirable work *The End of the Middle*

Ages, and Oscar Browning in his *Guelphs and Ghibellines*.

Moreover the references given by Symonds blaze the way for further research, furnishing the student with much time-saving information. He introduces us to Webster, Tourneur, Ford, and other Elizabethan dramatists who drew the plots of their tragedies from Italian crimes, for which we may also consult Henri Beyles's *Chroniques et Nouvelles*, Roscoe's *Tales from Italian Novelists* and the original novelli, of which those by Boccaccio and Sacchetti are the most entertaining. Of Italian historians we have Machiavelli, Nardi, Villani, Sismondi, Bembo, and such memoirs as Castiglione's and Cellini's.

Of biographies every large library contains its collection, and to the admirable articles in the *La Rousse* and *La Grande Encyclopedies* are appended references to standard authorities.

Roscoe's *Lorenzo de' Medici* has long been a classic, but the author has found the later biography by Alfred Von Reumont more comprehensive, while the *Lorenzo de' Medici* by E. Armstrong in the "Heroes of the Nations" Series is perhaps the most satisfactory of all. The genealogical table of the Medici family is

with a few additions that compiled for the *Clarendon Press* at Oxford.

Christopher Hare's *Illustrious Ladies of the Renaissance* devotes interesting monographs to the Medici women. For their popes we must go to Ranke and Gregorovius, and for the artists who made the reign of Lorenzo glorious to Vasari.

Turning to Venetia we shall find all of Horatio Brown's books delightful. Ruskin, too, can never be displaced, and for critical studies of the works of the painters the author has found most helpful the Series *Great Masters in Painting and Sculpture* edited and in great part written by Dr. George Williamson.

The Portfolio Monographs furnish good reproductions of famous Italian paintings, and Berenson's *Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance* compresses much that is valuable into little space, while Mr. and Mrs. Blashfield in their *Italian Cities* unite connoisseurship with delightful descriptive passages.

The present volume makes no pretence of being a work on architecture or landscape gardening. These subjects have been exhaustively treated by experts whose books are accessible to all. That on the *Modern Archi-*

illas

Vernon, though the
Pensieri Vanni is a

greatest debt, and
who cannot say the
even to pay that debt
a passion for Italy?
innumerable company
Milton, Shelley,
Browning, Rossetti,
T. Story, and many
names may not be re-
heartfelt gratitude.

